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PHILIP THE FORESTER

PHILIP THE FORESTER

A ROMANCE OF THE VALLEY OF GARDENS

BY

DANIEL EDWARDS KENNEDY, M.A.

AUTHOR OF "UNDINE AND OUR SYLVAN WORLD"

AND "THE RAT-TRAP MAN."



BROOKLINE, MASS.

THE QUEEN'S SHOP

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DANIEL EDWARDS KENNEDY

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MORE THAN THEIR RELATIONSHIPS IMPLIED,
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IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

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CHAPTER I

THE PAINTING OF THE SLEIGH

A YOUNG WOMAN walked along the little foot-path, that wiggled its way beside the road. Her look of arch shyness gave to her beauty a suggestion of her having been deeply wounded. Her hesitation indicated that she was laboring under an emotional strain. Her dark eyes and dark hair were made conspicuous by the flush from the summer's sun, that spread over her cheeks, and reached to her neck, among the softest hair of her head. Her faltering step, from which one might think her a daunted creature, at bay, doubtful whether to stand or flee, seemed inconsistent with the strength of the mature body that she appeared to have; a strength that one finds, more often in the European peasantry, than in an American country girl. Presenting her foot, she carefully felt, as it were, with her toes, thereby displaying a high-arched instep, while at the same time she lifted her skirts above her ankles, & selected spots, where the dust appeared not

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to be deep; just as she would have done, if, in coming along the road, she had been timidly crossing a brook on stepping-stones. Her progress was slow, despite her activity. Her every movement showed that she was undergoing a conflict of impulses; that she was undecided whether to go on, or to turn back toward the village.

Had she been going up the east side of the valley, she probably would have provoked no unusual comment. Her black dress, and her emotion, would have caused one to have assumed that she was wending her weary way to the village burial ground, in which her father had been but lately laid, and wherein a sodless mound was most noticeable among so many green ones.

On such an errand of filial respect and piety, we would not have been surprised to have seen her falter, and hesitate, whether to go on in the course that had, for her, no little mystery, and superstition, and ignorant fear; or to give way to an overwhelming sense of loneliness, and return to her home. For, young as she was, she had not become accustomed to death, and the sorrows, & needs, and problems, that it brings. She had just come to that time in life, when the girl suddenly finds herself mature in body and mind; when the traces of her girlishness are not entirely gone, and those of her womanhood are not entirely come. To-day, she had, in memory, one crucial event, from which she could date a great awakening in

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her life. That, was the recent death of her father. Before that time, all her memory was made up of endless happinesses; happinesses that were even more memorable because they were innocent and thoughtless. Since then, there was almost an obliteration of everything in her old life; her youthful, happy days were remembered, with difficulty and vagueness, and she seemed to be stunned; to be only half conscious of all that had happened.

To-day, for the first time since her father's death, she was aroused from the stupor of the sorrow; she realized her position, and that of her mother; and, with the sunny weather and a blue sky above her, she started out, with a determination that surprised herself, more than it did those, near her, in kin or locality. Still, the importance of her mission, the slight, immature acquaintance, with the people whom she expected to meet, and the occasional returns of her former girlish character, made it necessary for her to stop, more than once, when she was in a place unseen, and give vent to her mental strain, by tears.

Her crying seemed to have come to serve her for more than an outlet for all her pent-up emotion; for, could she have seen and judged herself, as others were bound to do, she would have agreed that the crying, & the summer's heat, had added no little to the beauty of her features. The coloring, that nature had given, being taken away by the misfortune that had fallen on her home, was very

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skillfully replaced by the embarrassment attending her situation, and the unusual height of temperature; so that one might think that she had been subjected to the careful arts of the "make up", with the view to making her best appearance. At least, so she appeared on this day.

Under the circumstances, it was indeed fortunate that she sought the place that she did. There was something quite natural and fitting, in her going down to the Farm of the Blue Sleigh, with the purpose of interviewing the man who had formerly been considered as one of her father's best friends; the man whose name was always linked with those of Weaklig and Wells, whenever there was occasion to point with pride to any of the villagers. There was something, almost supernatural in the circumstance, when one remembered that she, who had almost always found happiness and prosperity, at hand in the village, had now been driven to seek an aid to sustenance, by going down the valley to the farm, that was the farthest from the village. The blow that had helped to mature her, seemed, at the same time, to have compelled her to enter the round of life of those whom she knew well by report, but perhaps less, in fact, than any other of the inhabitants of the whole valley. Added to this was the fact that her appearance was favorable; no pale, sad girl, wrapped up in an unnatural melancholy, but an unusual, beautiful, strong, young woman, bravely

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struggled to put away night thoughts, by the earliest of the awakenings of her half-helpless maturity.

Behind her, she had left the gurgle and babble and joy of a brook; she was just far enough away from it, to have lost its cheery sound, when she came to that long reach of dusty path, continued past the hop field on the right, crossed the road, & came alongside of the small orchard, where the wiggly path led toward one of the barns of the Farm of the Blue Sleigh.

As she neared the so-called field barn, the smaller of the two, or, what might more truthfully be termed, the less monstrous of the two, she cast her eyes around, attempting to discover who was whistling.

The hugeness of the structure, made the position of the whistler, as doubtful as if he were a ventriloquist; so that, in vain, she glanced up the new-mown hillside toward the sylvan lands and orchards, and down the road to the romantic garden and the house, and then, down the rows of fruit trees, in the orchard, which she was passing.

Between this orchard and the field barn, there were wagon ruts in the sod; ruts that ran down through the declining field to the river. Reaching from the highway, along the grassy road, alongside the orchard, there was a high, thick hedge of arbor-vitæ.

Spying about for that musical person, Mildred came to the end of the hedge, and stopped. As she looked down

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that faintly-worn road, she saw Philip, Mason's only son, the forester. He was giving the old Blue Sleigh its biennial coat of paint, and his puckered lips showed that he was the whistler.

"Is your father home?" she called to him.

Philip stopped his song, dropped the brush across the pail, looked up, and bowed. Mildred walked on the grassy ridge, up the centre of the road to him.

"Good morning. Father is working up on the hill."

At the same time that he spoke, he wiped his hands on his overalls, and then stood there silent, wondering why she wanted to see his father; and half-impudently gazing at her, as if bewildered. Partly, from a sympathy, that the fortunate often deign to bestow upon the unfortunate, and partly, because of the strength of character, as well as beauty, that, for the first time, he was conscious of in the face of the woman before him: he became more interested in her.

"What did you want of father? Is it anything I can get, or—" He looked in her eyes, swollen and red from crying, and seeing that she was about to speak, he stopped.

"Oh, no. I wanted to see him about business." Mildred answered, after a little nervous hesitation.

Then the truth came to him, and he asked, "You did n't want work, did you?"

Mildred slipped to the ground, bowed her head, & the

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tears came, quickly, because she had been holding them back for such a long time.

"I did n't mean to hurt you, Mildred. I did n't think you might feel sensitive. I'm sorry my interest in you led me to ask so coldly. I might have been more sympathetic."

The tender tone of his voice, a tone that she had not heard from him, since they were children, caused her to look up at him, and his sympathetic expression gave her strength and courage. She held back the tears, and sat up, and looked at him squarely.

"Do—do you think I could get some work with your father?" she asked, as she wiped her wet lids and cheek on her hand.

"I do n't see why you should not. Father seems to be able to use all the help he can get. And hop picking is n't so very far off, now. Surely you could pick hops. Phoebe did some last year. It was her first time at hop picking. She picked nearly three boxes a day and held the record. You can be sure the daughter of a Wells will not want help when she comes to a Mason."

Mildred gave him a look, that expressed more gratitude than words would have. Then, after another little hesitation, during which the two remained speech- and motionless, she jumped to her feet and spoke.

"Where is your father? I think I'll try the hop picking, anyway. It would be a good work for me, just now."

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"There 's no need to see father. I can promise you will be welcome."

"But I would rather see him. Where is he?"

"You stay here and I 'll go for him. He 's way up in the woods. And it is hard climbing. Much too rough for you."

"But I 'm strong. I 'm sure I can do it, if you would tell me just where to find him."

"No. You must n't tramp up through the deep woods. You see we just cut down the underbrush, a day or two ago, and it is n't very kind to skirts. These—" and Philip hesitated, looking down at his tight overalls. "These are just the thing to wear in the woods."

"But the sleigh! Your painting is n't finished and I do n't like to take your time."

"Never mind the sleigh and my time. With the apples on the trees, I guess I 'll find enough time to finish it long before it can be used."

"You have n't got another pair of overalls, have you?"

Philip did not answer. He laughed and turned away. Then he walked along the grass, beside the hedge, and crossed the public roadway. Naturally, Mildred's gaze followed him, and she watched him vault the fence, and plod his way up the field.

What a strong, healthy young man he was! He was also good looking. Not handsome, but very good looking.

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There was something about his mouth and eyes, that gave one confidence in his honesty and purity.

As he strode along, laboriously ascending the hillside, Mildred seemed to feel as weak as a child, compared to him. Perhaps that was because she had noticed the big muscles in his wrists and forearm, as he rubbed the sky-blue paint from his hands; perhaps she called to mind the reputation that he had in the valley. Be that as it may, now, as he walked, it seemed to her that unusual strength was portrayed by the swing of his shoulders and arms; so that she could not help but call to mind that his father had been, erstwhile, the strongest man in all the valley; that the very color of the paint on the sleigh, had been in the olden days monopolized, as it were, by the family; so that the villagers felt free to use a sky-blue on the ceiling of their piazzas, on pumps, hay wagons, wells, and even on the framework of grind-stones, but the patent and rights in a Blue Sleigh had been taken out by Mason strength and lately no one had disputed the title to use it with the same monopolistic idea as if it had been his own family coat-of-arms. So, as he walked, Philip seemed to Mildred to be a veritable counterpart of the elder; but in reality, an advanced education, & greater opportunities had helped to cool the fighting blood, that he inherited; so that he had the strength, without having the suggestion of his father's old-time, respected "bullyism".

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In the field, he met a bull. To her, he seemed to give a challenge to it. Perhaps it was because the animal was an old pet of his, and its playfulness prompted it to stand for an instant in the forester's path. Then, as if afraid to lower its horns to attack him, it made a hasty retreat, clumsily thundering off to the other end of the field.

Why was it, that, up to this time, she had always been estranged from this strong young man, who unselfishly had proffered his help to her? True it was, that, as children, she and he had attended the village school, and in those days, he had seemed to pay more than the necessary attention to her; so that many of the romances and realities of child life were lived by them together; but, later when she had stopped school, and he had gone for advanced education to the Liberal Institute in the city to the north, she had indeed become a stranger to him, and it was only by occasional meetings, at village functions, that she had renewed and continued their childhood acquaintance. That much was, at least, due her out of his respect to her father's comradeship with his father, if not for the reason that she always had liked him better than the other young men of the village. But the romances, that had been, long ago, buried beneath the ponderous perplexities of his life's work, and now, were almost forgotten by him, had a meaning of more than play to the girl. Despite the fact, that she knew he had forgotten

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them, deep in her girlish heart, in the secret and sacred depths of her soul, she had kept his image, and, to it, she had made more young girl's prayers, and had rendered more homage, than anyone knew.

It seemed clear that it was preordained, as it were, or fated and destined, for her to find help in Philip, only when she had been deprived of her father. For a time, the scales of fortune appeared so finely adjusted, as to weigh a parent's love, with that of a struggling young forester. It seemed intended that she should find the new life, that had been suggested to her, by means of Mason, the father, and Mason, the son.

Suddenly, a light seemed to burst upon her, everything around her brightened up, as if in the glare of a million lamps, and she seemed to see a succession of happinesses that called forth all the old girlish dreams and fancies. The thought that Philip might love her, came to her, as unconsciously as it does to all of us; it somehow stole into her mind, and, for an instant, it drove out all reason.

Then, just as suddenly, her happiness, and the sun-lit futurity, became darkened, and the loss of her father, the difficult position of her mother and herself, & the partial estrangement of her and Philip, came back with overwhelming force, and the tears swelled in her eyes. Then it was, that she realized, with all its importance, that the days of her happy, thoughtless, innocent, girlhood, had

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gone forever, to become only a treasure of her memory.

Foolish that I am, thought Mildred. By that look he might mean nothing more than the increased interest in her, that he had acknowledged he had; an interest aroused by the circumstances. Perhaps his sympathy was but temporary. Perhaps it was a pity for her late loss. Surely it could not be more than any one of these.

He seemed to her, and she almost wished him to be, the type of a young man who would admire, and worship, someone of more activity and freeheartedness and frivolity, if you please; someone who had never had an overwhelming sorrow; someone more like Phoebe, the innkeeper's pretty daughter. Yes, indeed, Phoebe was the one for Philip. She had a pretty face like a doll, she had life sparkling and brimming over with happiness, she was active, she could win a hop-picking record, she could command the villagers, and happily cheer him, on the road to a prosperous career in his forestry.

Then, as if her dying girlhood had given an expiring struggle for more life, a fitful change of feeling came over her, and she sent in flight the castles in the air, that she had been building for coquettish Phoebe. But, she had no more than done that, than down upon her own head came the castles that she had seen towering aloft. She felt ashamed to think that she had imagined such a thing as Philip's loving her. He was gentlemanly; yes, even

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more than gentlemanly; but then, it must all be a little chivalry, on his part. In truth the Masons were known for that trait, as well as for the athletic record. Of course, he had forgotten all those childish days and ways, and it might seem only amusing to recall them. Then too, he was just beginning to struggle against the sentiment of the villagers, in regard to his forestry. Perhaps he had hope of using her as a means of spreading his new ideas among them. If he had, how truly she would hate him! Perhaps she hated him a little, now. Nevertheless, she kept looking at him, as he rose higher and higher, up the hillside path, to the wooded lands above.

He came to the line of fence, vaulted it, and the woods swallowed him up, as if by the touch of a magician's wand. Mildred caught her breath, and sighed.

She looked down the field to the river bank, where the sheep were feeding. A bare-headed and bare-footed boy stood near them, throwing stones into the water. His little shouts of joy & the faint tinklings of the sheep bells came to her ears. Up the valley, a mowing machine was going around a field. Although the trees obstructed her view, the oft-interrupted sound of the machinery, and the commands of the driver, reached her, as she sat there.

A wren perched on the arbor-vitæ hedge, and sang its perfect cadenced song. Mildred watched it flit and dodge its way behind the barn door, from which came the cries

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of the young birds in the nest. A yellow butterfly flickered along and over the hedge, to the orchard. She looked at the partly-repainted sleigh, and mechanically took up the brush.

"I 'll paint for him, while he does my errand." she said. And she tried it.

The painting seemed to be easy, quiet, tranquil. As, in coming up the grassy ridge, she had seen Philip do, she drew the brush in long, straight strokes. In the clear warm air and the sunshine, with the chirping of the birds, and an occasional tremor of the trees, she forgot, for a time, her sorrow, and worked and worked at the painting, leaning over and occasionally squinting at it; what for, she did not know, but, she had seen Philip do it. For a time she became like a child, a little feeling of her old freeheartedness, and insincerity, and lack of seriousness came over her, as she naively tried to imitate the forester. But, it was only by an effort that she could do it; for her state of mind was more inclined to lead her to give the sleigh a slap, here & there, regardless how the paint might spatter about, or how the work might be done.

Great griefs seem to be more easily borne when a person gives one's self, body and soul, as it were, to some engrossing occupation. Many have all-absorbingly turned to the arts, the professions and the businesses of life, in that desolate period, after the greatest and seemingly

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most necessary help and encouragement has been put away in a new grave; the greatest rage of the furies has thus been turned into the peaceful quiet of the untroubled soul; the one most apt for insanity has been quieted, set at ease and contentment, and normalized. And the more incongruous the task, the more peace.

Could there be a more telling difference than a dismal funeral, and a coat of sky-blue paint on a sleigh? It seems not. And that inconsistency, that unrelatedness of things, was the cause of the time passing quickly, while Mildred waited for Philip to return.

She was so taken by surprise, as he came around the corner of the barn, that his step made her jump. At the same time she felt, as if, in painting, she were guilty of some crime. Perhaps the inconsistency occurred to her for the first time, bringing along with it a guilty flush to her cheeks, putting to flight the young girl, and bringing back the young woman.

"You can paint, can't you?" he spoke.

She held the brush in her hand—the paint had run all over her fingers.

"I hope I have not spoiled the sleigh. I only intended to do just a little, not enough to hurt it, I hope," she answered, as she gave a finishing sweep to some of the splotches of paint.

"No. The sleigh has had a good many worse paintings

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than this one." And Philip looked at her work, as if he were criticising it, when in reality, he was so absorbed in thought, that he did not see the sleigh at all.

"Indeed you've done quite the contrary," he added. "Just run the brush over there to smooth it out, and it will—"

"What did your father say?" she asked, still holding the brush, and not offering to do as he said, or to surrender it.

"He wants to see you—he said you should stay over to dinner."

"Oh! I could n't do that. Mother expects me back, and she would worry. And besides, I can go home, and come again this afternoon."

"And find father up in the woods again," Philip added.

"But I might go and tell her, and then come back."

Philip took out his watch and looked at it.

"You could n't go home and back in ten minutes, could you?" he asked, looking at her.

"My, it took so much longer to come down here than I thought it would," she exclaimed.

"Well, you'll have to stay, if you want to talk with him. You see you will, do n't you?"

"You are quite sure he will give me work?" she asked.

Philip looked at her, then turned and walked toward the barn door. "Give you work?" He went in the barn. "Well I just guess he will, if he should see you painting."

His answer made Mildred feel happier, and she con-

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tinued to paint. Philip came out, holding another brush.

"I am so glad you are sure he will take me. You see mother, and I—" She dropped the brush.

"Do n't let those tears come again," he addressed her. "We have got to paint the sleigh. And we 'll do it, together. Will we?"

She looked up at him, and quickly passing her hand over her eyes, took up the brush. Whereupon he took a place at the other side, the pail of paint being on the old sleigh between them. Gradually her thoughts came from that hard loss, and its consequent need, back to the sleigh. Gradually the helplessness of the girl gave place to the self-confidence of the young woman. She smiled, and went on in the painting. But this time, she entered into the enjoyment of it; for she had none of that guilty feeling and she knew that she was rendering some service.

Philip reached over for the pail.

"I guess you had better put it in the middle." Mildred spoke up.

"You would get more paint on your dress."

"Oh, yes. I forgot about that." She looked down at her black skirt and rubbed at a prominent blue spot of paint, making it worse and worse. Then she gave a little shake of her head,—a move that said plainly, "I do n't care."

"We can wash it all out with a little turpentine. Black spots on a blue dress would really be serious." Philip said.

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"Of course we can," she added, and resumed painting.

The pail was left where it had been, nearer to Mildred.

Philip made a few strokes, and then squinted at them.

"Why do you squint? So?" she asked, imitating him.

He laughed. Something about the pose of her head, and the look on her face, made him wish she would do it again. He pretended to misunderstand, and stopped his painting.

"You can do it—all of it—I won't do any—I'll superintend. When you get through there—"

"You do n't understand. I asked why do you squint?" Mildred repeated, emphatically.

Philip gave another stroke to the painting of the sleigh.

"Do n't know—unless it be—to look cute and pretty."

She did not answer—and she did not squint.

With a black flash, a robin flew past them, and perched on a tree near the hedge. A long, happy lyric of robin melody filled the air. With the intention of watching the bird, Philip looked up, and caught Mildred in the act of idly looking at him; whereupon she quickly looked down and continued painting.

"How are the trees at the city man's down the river?" she asked.

"Very good. But I wish they would grow faster."

Philip looked up at her—she had daubed her hand, instead of putting the brush in the pail. He surmised that

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she had been looking at him again; but, he did not speak.

"Is he a kind man?—that Mr. Burleigh?"

"Yes. Very kind. He likes to help one along. I go down there, whenever I can find a little time. He allows me to poke around among his books, and he has some fine ones on birds."

"Oh, you like birds, do you? I thought you hated them."

"That was when we went to school," said Philip.

"Yes, quite a long while ago."

"Do you remember that time when you sent Phoebe Martin home?" Mildred asked, her eyes glowing with the remembrance of that day.

"Perfectly. And you and I went hunting after that cat-bird, that I hated so."

"And because I found it, you kissed me."

"Did I?"

Mildred's thoughts were running wildly, the girlhood was dying with a great deal of struggling.

"Yes. I have n't forgotten it."

Philip was silent,—he looked at her searchingly. She perceived that he was wondering at her. With a gasp, the girlhood was dead.

"Oh! But you like birds, now," she resumed, with much more self-possession than she had ever thought herself capable of.

"Yes. I have been trying to study them. They have a

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good deal to do with my forestry work, and you know Mr. Burleigh would do anything to help me in that."

Mildred suddenly dropped the brush into the pail, and reaching down, rubbed the paint from her hands on the grass. Then she gave a few rubs to the spot on her dress, and looked about, nervously.

"Here comes your father," she said. "Oh! You must get the turpentine. Quick!" she added.

Philip went into the barn, and immediately returned with the bottle. Then he dropped on his knee before her, and offered to help remove the paint, but she motioned him to rise up, and he did. Their glances shifted from the paint to the roadway, and back, again and again.

Mason had come down the field, & was climbing over the fence. A slight woman, dressed in blue calico, with a cream-colored sun-bonnet concealing her features, had just come from the village, and, as Mason dropped off the fence, she stopped in the road before him. Then they talked; but the distance, from the road to the sleigh, did not allow Philip and Mildred to hear their conversation.

"That's Mary Whipple," Mildred spoke up.

"She probably wants to pick hops for father. I wish he would n't employ her. I do n't like her," said Philip.

"I wonder if she would n't tell mother that I am going to stay to dinner."

"I'll bet she tells everybody in the village," Philip re-

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plied. "And I guess your mother will easily hear of it."

Mildred was silent. If she had wished to say more, she could not, for her thoughts were suddenly centered on the older man.

Evidently Mary Whipple had come to some decision with Mason; for she turned toward the village; while he came up the road, toward the Blue Sleigh.

Mildred was beginning to feel a little nervous, and was again struggling with the tears. Philip gave a glance at his father, and then watched the woman in blue calico.

Mary stopped, looked back toward the Blue Sleigh & muttered; then, with a switch of her skirts, continued on her way, passing out of sight at the end of the hedge. Philip laughed aloud. Mason drew near. Mildred looked at the forester and then at his father. Suddenly she found that she did not have to fight back the tears.





CHAPTER II

THE GOLDEN DOG

AS ONE walked, westward from the corner store, along the stony path, the quaint, old, ornamented signboard, on one of the big elms, gave a welcome, with an unearthly and uncanny creak & scratching of the rusty, iron rings; and, as you passed, the smaller trees swayed gently to and fro, and suggested to you, that they were reaching out pleading arms, in the hope of clasping you in their embrace, and forever after making you a satellite of the Golden Dog.

Here, the village inn, tavern, hotel, had its berth, and, amid the aged elms, that overspread, and dropped dead branches on its gambrel roof, it seemed to have settled itself in a bed of softest verdure, extending its weary legs in the form of two extensions, and sending forth its greatest noise, from the western end, where lay the head, as it were, of a big sleeping giant. At times, when everybody and everything was supposed to be sleeping "the sleep

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that knows not breaking", the monster would snore and snore, as if he were the god of thunder himself, living in utter ignorance, & disregard, of the peace of the inhabitants; so that it was considered a misfortune to have one's life cast in proximity to the boisterous tavern.

In approaching the front door, the gravel ominously grated under foot, and gave timely warning of your approach, and then, perhaps, one stopped to look back at the signboard.

The effigy, of the Dog, was a curious piece of work, with black, diamond-shaped hollows in its head, for eyes; a club-like tail, two sizes too large for the dog; legs suggestive of those on a Windsor chair; and snout very much like an old fire-bucket. Surely, the ancient designer of it could not, in his wisdom, have stopped to think how the dog could walk, with such legs, how he could wag such an enormous tail, and how he could turn his eyes, in such sockets. Perhaps, in his opinion, the dog had no need of walking, perhaps the snout was a fire-bucket, perhaps the dog was blind, perhaps, as some assert, the club tail wagged the dog, rather than vice versa.

But, why the dog was called golden was quite inexplicable. Some claimed that, obviously, it must have been made of that precious metal, but the man, who recently painted it, said that there were probably one hundred coats of paint on it, and after he had dug away a lump of

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paint, from the forehead of the dog, he swore the metal was not gold, any more than the "stuff" that old Silas Pepperman dug out of the glen.

However, be the dog golden or no, it did not look, and, except in the case of strangers, it never was called so. It was yellow, a pale, lemon yellow; so that one would think that the poor beast, being in such close "touch" with the village painter, had contracted, from him, a complication of anemia and jaundice.

Of course, correctly, the tavern should have been called "the Yellow Dog", but at its christening the godfathers refused to give it any such impediment. And they did so wisely, it seems; for, in that village, a man, who was a good deal of a drunkard, was said to "have a yellow dog", and of course it would not do to endanger the repute of the house.

But it came about that no one ever referred to the full name of the village inn; they just called it by the canine appellation of "the Dog"; so that the color, or material, was, after all, merely a superfluity of naughtiness.

The inn was a semi-antiquated affair. Back in the early eighteenth century, and for some years previous, in a mysterious and dark past, of which there is no authentic history, it was said to have echoed the winding call of stage horns, to have sheltered some homely heroes of local worship, and to have been the refuge of more than

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one company of proud travellers, who had had a humiliating experience, with one of the masked knights of the road, or had been incapacitated for further travel by fright of ghosts and spectres. As far as one could learn, from the oldest inhabitant, it never had given shelter to George Washington on one of his numerous journeys; so that it might perhaps be said to be an uncommon tavern, when we consider how rare such a claim is.

Despite its antique characteristics, it had quite a modern look; for, it had been newly clap-boarded & shingled; the large, square, brick chimney had been "pointed up", and a plain, unpretentious, and ugly piazza had been built along the western half of it. A line of asters grew along the edge of the piazza; a woodbine climbed up the western end, and festooned branches along the front; and a group of lilac bushes stood at each side of the walk.

The lower floor of the gambrel-roofed front, was cut into unequal portions, by the low passageway, through which vehicles were admitted into the courtyard. More than one had suspected the veracity of the story, wherein it was stated, that the coaches used to drive through to the court within. Probably, if the driver, of one of those old-fashioned, high conveyances, had so lost his judgment of distance, as to attempt such a feat, the top passengers, and part of the coach roof, would have remained outside. Be that as it may, a covered carriage could just

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enter it safely, but, even in that case, the whip scraped along the ceiling.

As one reached the courtyard, the first point of attraction was the barn, standing solitary, on the north side of the court. Not that the affair had about it any wonderful display of architecture or æsthetics, not that it really deserved more than a passing glance, but because it looked so lonesome, when one's eyes had become accustomed to the seemingly amalgamated mass of buildings, that made up the tavern proper. But soon there appeared other attractions, much more attractive.

The landlord with smile-wreathed face, and nervous little attempts at portly bows, in which his stomach interfered, seemingly a personification of old-time hospitality, assisted the ladies in the door, and reminded the men of their old weakness, by suggestively wiping his mouth. Then, while all this capering and conspicuous coquetting was going on, if there happened to be one fair young man among the new comers, there were great chances that a squeaky-voiced girl, with her hair tied up in a towel, and a broom in her hand, would stick her head out of one of the windows, in the east wing, & "want to know if eight was to be given up, to-day." And, when she had received an answer, which she knew beforehand, she would forget her work, and lean on the window sill. At the same time, from the kitchen, and small dining-room, on the

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ground floor of the western wing, came the odor of cooking, and an extra loud clashing of dishes and ringing of silver and cutlery, as if all the helpers were hucksterers making a clatter to call attention to their wares.

The hostelry of the Valley of Gardens was a survival of the fittest. It had, by a long course of years, come to stay. Even after the daily snail-paced coaches gave way to the railroad that came into the valley five miles north, it found a demand, and with a bar-room, a small dining room, a good kitchen, and ten simple & clean bed rooms, under the personal direction of a jolly, good, honest man, it met that demand.

Some years ago, its prosperity excited envy, and soon it had a dangerous rival; but, in course of time, the Golden Dog survived on the merits of landlord Martin.

Bill Comstock, a man of imagination, and somewhat of a historical reader, came fresh, and wise, and enterprising, from the city, and set up a new tavern. His plan was to catch the trade, by an appeal to the two characteristics, most prominent in himself. For the intellectual, and there were many, in the village, he would find some local sage, to play the part of a Samuel Johnson, and draw around him, in the glare of a big fire, a circle of admiring literary louts; he would serve up old-fashioned possets, and drinks that had had a red-hot poker thrust into them, and were strong enough to make a cork-screw out of the poker.

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He would give his rooms the names of famous historical personages, or, what was just as sensible, of all the colors of the rainbow; with every twenty-cent drink, he would guarantee a kiss from the prettiest of barmaids; and he would have all the sheets in the house smell of lavender. In fact, he was going to show the country people how to run an attractive tavern. But, Bill found he had come to the wrong place. He did attract all those, who had any temporary grudge against Martin, all the foreign element and drifting population, all those who had the curiosity to try the inn, because it was new. But when he slapped a big, strong lumberman on the back, and told him he was "mine host of ye Peaceful Inn," and asked him "how he passed the time of day," the lumberman, who had passed the worst night of his life, in one of the lavender-smelling feather beds, turned round, answered "by fellin' trees", and with a swing of his right arm, laid him out stiff on the floor. From that time, the place, and its relation to the village, came to have the reputation of being anything but "peaceful", and after a fitful and convulsive career of nine months, during which most of its patrons tried to imitate the lumberman, the villagers held a hurried meeting, the constable came and closed it up, and later, the whole outfit was sold out at auction.

It seemed the irony of fate to see Martin bidding on some of the fittings of Peaceful Inn, and some of the vil-

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lagers, who disliked Bill, or his purpose, were very much elated, when they sat on the stoop of the corner store, & saw load after load of Peaceful Inn furniture going down the western road to the Golden Dog.

As for Martin, he was not the kind of a man to feel like that. He had good use for what he purchased, he had no personal grudge to settle with Bill, he had won, and won fairly, and, Bill was no longer even his business rival.

A story went the rounds of the village gossips that he had bid "purty high" on some things. It must have been started by someone of a generous nature, it surely showed that the author of it was entirely ignorant of Martin's true character. Then there was another report, to the effect, that after the auction, the two landlords were seen, on the back doorstep, drinking a cordial glass or two, or more, from a bottle, saved from the auctioneer's hammer, for that purpose. It may have been true, and those who knew Martin well, did not entirely disbelieve it, although it did come through the same doubtful channel—a village gossip's tongue. However, it was apposite, and just as good as true; for from that time forth, Comstock appeared to be a good friend of Martin's, and often patronized his bar. In fact the cordiality, that ever after existed between them, and what appeared to be a sort of stoicism, on the part of Bill, made some suspicious that they had had an understanding from the first. Be that as it may,

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the Golden Dog had come to hold a time-honored position in the village life,—a position that could be, for the most part, accounted for, by the character of the landlord.

Long before Bill Comstock came to the valley, Martin saw the demand of the village, bought up the old tavern, that had stood there for a time longer than the report of the village could verify, and started out to meet that demand. Of course there were a good many village meetings, and people who abused their families and never had attended church, gave many hour talks on religion and morals. But despite the appeals, made by childless women, “not to send our sons to the devil by opening a real saloon bar”, Martin worked himself into the good graces of the villagers, won a heated debate at a town meeting, and having secured a license, so full of details and technicalities, that it could easily be construed to suit almost any occasion, he opened the inn.

Martin had one trait,—or was it a habit, contracted by diplomacy?—that helped to obtain the village position, that was accorded to the Dog. Of course, the old license compelled him to close his bar-room on Sundays, and, as he found nothing else passed the time agreeably, he became a church-going man, perhaps not any too religious but respectably church-going. So, he veritably washed out, on Sundays, the stains that the liquor traffic made on week-days. Besides, he never served drink to anyone

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whom he knew to be drunk. In good faith, his instructions, to the waitresses, were again and again repeated, not to take orders for those "under the influence". That, was in accordance with the terms of his license. But, in the rush of business, the girls, on whom he had to rely, were not always good judges, and Martin had not the time to watch the whole crowd, as if they were children; while the days, when the village constable spent most of his time in the tavern, keeping tally of the orders given by each man, were gone and almost forgotten.

When, occasionally, a bad scene happened at the inn, he always managed it, so that the voting villagers learned of the repentance of the actors; at least, of those, who were villagers. For the outsiders, he did not have a personal care, and he had made no especial promise; his one point was to look after the villagers, and if necessary, his fist settled the affair, because to-day there were few fists equal to his. Still, there was one thing noticed about his use of his fist, and that was that the person, who offended in the bar-room, did not appear again in the village, until all traces of blackened eyes and drunkenness were gone, and because no one was ever seen to come from the inn, in anything but passable condition, the landlord could depend on holding the license, and having it renewed, again and again.

In character the landlord was very much of the tradi-

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tional "mine host," a man of consequence, a man of not necessarily good, but unsoiled reputation. In appearance, he was a jolly, big, fat, grey-haired fellow—a red face—moustache a slight tinge of yellow around the mouth, perhaps from an occasional glass of cheap whiskey,—big muscles standing out on his bare arms—sleeves up as far as they could be rolled — one big, starched, white, animated apron.

In a corner of the bar-room, two old cronies sat playing checkers. They were having an hour, or so, of evening enjoyment, before the inn, according to its custom, became noisy.

Leaning over the bar, so that their heads almost touched, were Martin the landlord, and Bill Comstock, his old rival; while Phoebe, Martin's pretty daughter, was acting the go-between, whenever a clink of a glass indicated that the cronies desired more drinks.

These two old cronies made an odd pair, such a pair as anachronically might have been made by Lincoln and Falstaff. Although they had traits in common, to make one another's companionship agreeable, they also had enough disagreements, to make their union somewhat amusing, and exceedingly instructive.

Their enjoyment of good drink, taken in moderation, was common, their chance and desire for a leisure hour or two, from their respective callings in life, was fortun-

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ate, but the one point, on which they exchanged the most sympathy, was their lack of domestic happiness. Paradoxical, as it may seem, each had a home, and yet, did not. Each maintained an establishment, and still, did not. Each was the mister of his house, and not the master. Each had a place to live in, and, most of the time, lived anywhere but there. They were poor plebeians, subject to petticoat government.

Tim was a bachelor, and his housekeeper was a tyrant and a tartar. Hi was a married man, with two children, and his wife nagged and scolded him, from the time when he came in sight, until his law-office hours took him away again.

And yet, there was something about their respective sovereigns that kept them faithful to them. Tim never had his own way, not even as to the location of the furniture, in his own room. He was entirely suppressed and ignored. He existed, only as a stimulus for law making. As a case in point, it was an invariable rule of his household, that there was a place selected for, and especially attributed to, his slippers. A square of paper lay on the floor, beside the kitchen stove, & on it, the harmless looking pair of slippers. The puzzle of his life, was to get the slippers off the paper, and his shoes on it, without soiling the floor. Needless to say, the feat had never been performed up to his sixty-fourth birthday. In truth, there

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was not any great cruelty, on the part of the housekeeper. If he made a failure, as he always did, she did not send him to bed, supperless, but, she would give him a look, that made him feel, as if his hundred and ninety pounds were only a nightmare, as if he had no existence at all, as if she were dealing with a mere spectre, or an hallucination of her brain. He was the man of no existence, save in the tyrant's abnormal imagination.

The old bachelor might be seen, almost any day, walking up and down his side yard, smoking. Usually, Tim strolled up and down somewhere, when he smoked; for there was no smoking allowed inside the house. It made no difference, whether it was warm or cold, whether the sun shone, and it was ninety in the shade, or whether it rained or thundered, or hailed, or snowed; he smoked outdoors, or he did not smoke.

To Tim, there seemed to be something fascinating about the slipper problem, something wise about that old smoking regulation, something helpful about the way in which his opinion was never consulted; so that the old bachelor was always ready to go back home, if no other place offered. But, he preferred the other place. While he often doubted his existence, still he wanted attention, even if he was treated as a ghost, and could be looked through; and he could not have lived, even half happily, had he not felt that the housekeeper thought enough of him, to sup-

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press him. If he was a ghost; at least, he was exorcised.

Hi, the old lawyer, had many times thought of saving himself from the constant scolding, by changing his office hours, but he had come to the conclusion that they were just long enough, and if made longer, his wife might take it into her head to come to live with him in the office; a threat she had often made. That, of course, would have really made his life unbearable.

He had been scolded so much, that life would have become vacant, without a scolding. He was accustomed to the nagging, just as he was to the sun's rising. Every day it was "Hiram do this", and "Hiram do that", and because it was usually the same thing to be done, he began to believe, that if he once did do it, he would never hear anything more about it, and, of course, then, because of mere monotony, he would have died.

While the individualities of the two cronies were distinct, while their disagreements were many and varied, while their notions and ideals were different, while their domestic difficulties were anything but similar; still there was such a great sympathy between them, such a mutual understanding of position, that they were bound together closer than if they had been brothers.

Phoebe came, to answer the clink of a glass, on their table. Hi, the tall, awkward, slim man, ordered ale, without taking his eyes from the board. Tim, his short, stocky

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companion, looked up, leaned back in the corner, and gave his order, while looking into the blue eyes of the innkeeper's pretty daughter. The village lawyer, in meditation, rubbed his pointed chin. Tim, the jolly, old property owner, the bachelor, drummed, with his fat fingers, a "devil's tattoo" on the table, and puffed away at his pipe.

"That girl is a pretty one." Tim spoke up, when Phoebe left them, returning to her seat, at the back of the room.

"Hum, I did n't notice she had changed. Your play!"

Tim shifted his pipe to the other side of his big mouth, and moved a checker. Hi instantly responded to the play, by jumping three of Tim's "men."

"By the good saint Bobby!" Tim ejaculated. "I did n't see that."

Meanwhile, Martin had been talking to Bill Comstock. From time to time, Bill nervously eased his position, shifting his light weight, from one foot to the other. In the city, he had contracted the habit of leaning over a lower bar, and he found the foot-rail of assistance, when he wished to pass a confidential remark to the ear of the barkeeper. Consequently, when he stood before Martin's bar, he had some difficulty. In a village tavern, such as the Golden Dog, where every one sat at a table and drank, there was no need of a foot-rail, and, because the bar was ancient, it was much higher, than those, to which Bill had become accustomed. So it was, that he was not a little uneasy.

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Bill had a decided citified air about him; so that one did not need to be told that he was not a native of the village. Added to that, he had an unfortunate weekness, of talking almost as much with his hands, as with his mouth, from which he appeared to be more or less of a jumping-jack. Had he been an ordinary talkist, he would not have appeared half so ludicrous. But, Bill was not ordinary, in any way. He talked like a Maxim gun—the words burst out of his mouth, in such rapid succession, that, at times, there seemed to be no succession at all, but just a stream of words. Moreover, he was an enthusiast,—he was ravished, as it were, by the beauty of this, and the “exquisite-ness” of that. He was not only a jumping-jack, but he was a jack-of-all-trades. One could not tell him anything, but that he would interrupt, and for a half-hour or more, monopolize the talk, in explaining how he painted, rode, swam, fished, wrote, read, taught, travelled, and all the long list of accomplishments & experiences ever known. In adventures, he could have out-talked De Mandeville, and Robinson Crusœ, and Gulliver, and Peter Wilkins. And then too, he did it all with an air—such an air, as we might guess surrounds an angel—an air, as if he were in danger of flying straight out of sight, up to heaven. And all this, until he would reach the culminatory point, by the most rapturous, devotional, ardent, assiduous eulogium, on “gay Paris”, and “odd Brittany”, and “picturesque

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Holland", that has ever been delivered by the most crack-brained native in existence. Of course, the thing, that Bill needed most, was a twelve hundred pound check-weight, to keep him down to the earth-earthy. Indeed his fancies were air drawn, and many of the villagers wished that, among them, he would find a dagger, and put it to good suicidal use.

Tim's pet exclamation, drew the attention of Bill to the old cronies, and having promised and sworn, to tell Martin more—although Martin did not seem to desire it,—he gayly tripped and jaunted his way to the front of the room.

Hi and Tim stopped their game, and looked up.

"Don't let me interrupt. Ah, I see. He has you in a nice trap." Bill exclaimed, addressing his remarks to Tim.

Of course they could not keep him from interrupting, so Tim nodded his head, and Hi looked first at the board, and then at Bill.

"How many times have you conquered?" Bill asked.

"Not once." Tim responded, rather sadly.

Hi looked up at Bill, and remarked, "I'm no tyrant or soldier of war. We play to win, Mr. Comstock, not to conquer!"

"Precisely so, precisely so." Bill answered, as he gave one of those leg-and-arms-fly-off movements.

Hi looked at Tim, and did not attend to Bill's antics.

"Why do n't you invert the board and try your skill at

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backgammon?" Bill added, in the pronunciation of which he obliterated the "ck".

Hi pricked up his ears, and, in wonder, Tim's eyes and mouth opened wide.

"Do you know how to play it?" Bill asked the lawyer.

"No." Hi grunted.

Then, Bill proceeded to explain. With a preliminary sketch, of how he learned it, in a café on the Boulevard in Paris,—at which Hi muttered "damn Paris",—how he played it, with an old peasant in Brittany,—at which Hi grunted,—how he once had the exquisite pleasure, of playing it with an artist, as they sat in the shadow of, and was fanned by, a windmill in Holland,—at which Hi wished the mill sails had cut off his head,—he finally came to the game, and succeeded in putting the details into the heads of the two cronies.

Needless to say, Hi was slow at learning it, partly, because he did not enthuse over anything, that came from Bill, and partly, because he was by nature, slow but very retentive. Tim took up with it immediately, and, to the delectation of the teacher, proved quite an adept.

This anciently called game of the "tables" was decidedly characteristic of the man who introduced it. Along with the Dr. Johnson circle, the red-hot-pokered drinks, the historic-named rooms, and the lavender-scented beds, went the old English game of the "tables", called in mod-

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ern, more particular, bold, phraseology, "backgammon."

It was said to have been a favorite diversion of the old heroes of romance, therefore it appealed to Bill; it had a suggestion in it of antiquity, and, of course that pleased his historic instincts; it brought to his memory a historic scene in a London coffee-house; it had fascinating French terms, such as *trois*, *quatre*, *cinq*; it had such an element of luck in it, that one's ability was usually the least important factor. For those reasons, Bill rejoiced, when he saw the two old men start to play their first serious game, in fact, he became so joyful over it, that, try as hard as he could, he was unable to keep still, and he talked and veritably sputtered, and walked from the side of one to that of the other, his eyes snapped like a mad man's, and he gesticulated with both hands, and made unsuccessful attempts to do so with his feet.

As far as any word, or deed, denoted his feeling toward it, Hi was satisfied; in fact he was not particular what he played, so long as it offered some amusement, some respite from his law, and his irritating wife.

Tim welcomed the game as a deliverer. For a year and two months, he had tried to win, one game of checkers. Every time they sat down to play, the old bachelor had a forlorn hope of winning—every time, Hi arose, the winner. Although it might have been very amusing, to have watched Tim, and instructive, to have kept account of

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the number of games played, before he decided to give it up, still such was not fated to be the case. It is too probable that they would have continued to play checkers all their playing days, had it not been for Bill.

Comstock introduced the choice & amusing English game of backgammon. The first time they tried it, Tim won. Whereupon, the bachelor vowed that, never again, would he play checkers. But, when they had played a few games, Tim, to his disappointment, found that he stood no better a chance of winning, than Hi. About the same time Bill "ran down", as we say of a mechanical toy, or a clock; politely excused himself, and went out of the front door, leaving the cronies, alone in their corner. Meanwhile, Martin had gone up stairs, and Phoebe had withdrawn to the kitchen.

Hi looked at Tim, and spoke softly, "Do you want to play this backgammon, any more?"

"Oh, I do n't care." Tim responded. "To tell the truth, I rather like it."

"If it was a new-fangled idea, I would n't play it. But it seems to have been played quite a good many years before we ever saw the earth." Hi added.

"I have been going to throw away those dice ever since we began to play here. Rather glad I did n't, now." Tim agreed.

"Yes." said Hi. "And it's lucky Wells kept them, too."

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He never played backgammon, that I know of, and he might have thrown them away."

"By the good saint Bobby, I'm glad he did n't." Tim exclaimed.

"Widow Wells was rather good to give them to you."

Tim responded the monosyllabic affirmative, then he added, as he moved the "men", in playing, "Too bad about the Wells family. That girl Mildred will have to support the mother now."

He packed down the ashes in his pipe, held his hands back of his head, and leaned back, hitting the old, hunting print on the wall. He stopped the picture's swinging, and waited for Hi to play.

"Guess she can stand work. John says she hammered out a horseshoe to win a bet for her father." the lawyer answered, as he shook the dice.

A big puff of smoke was compelled from the pipe.

"I'd like to have a daughter like that."

The lawyer was ahead in the game;—he was paying more attention to it, he was trusting, less to luck, & more to his intellect; he was taking what advantage he could; he was not conceited over a first victory; so that he felt that he could afford to joke. His eyes twinkled, and the so-called crow's feet came around them.

"Wells is gone. You can make her a step-daughter."

He laughed & laughed—a little, low, contented chuck-

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le, and rubbed his chin all the more, as if he were sharpening it, and his wits with it. The fat man suddenly grew serious, and attended to the game. They became silent, and after signalling by a tap on a glass, Phoebe brought their order.

Tim did not pay so much attention to her, as usual, & she turned away, with a cynical smile on her face. Only the fall of the dice, on the table, disturbed the unusual quiet of the room, and so, they played on for some time. Phoebe, preparing for the crowd, that would be there in an hour or two, made a deal of noise, in the act of lighting the lamps, and brushing up the hearth. In going out of the room, she slammed the door. Tim looked up from his pipe, and the board, & leaned over, close to Hi's partly bald head.

"Do you know? They say Mason's boy is in love with Wells' daughter."

Then he sat back, and puffing at the pipe, watched his crony's face. Hi looked his crony in the eyes.

"You do n't say so?" he asked.

"That's what I heard." Tim responded.

"I hope it's true. Mildred and Philip Mason would make a good match. I'm damn glad."

"But what's he got to support her on?" Tim inquired.
"Bobby!—she has n't anything."

"That's it. I was thinking of that little difficulty."

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"Seems as though they would have a hard time of it, if they did hitch up." Tim ventured, relighting the old pipe.

"Guess that 's why the widow wants to sell me that big piece of pasture land."

"Yes." Tim agreed.

"But, come to think of it, I guess Mason wo n't let his boy get into any love affair, till his forestry will support them."

Tim leaned forward again.

"Some money must be in the boy's name,—at least it looks so, from the way this bar-maid Phoebe has been trying to win him."

Then he sat back in the corner, and puffed contemplatively at his pipe.

"Perhaps Mason gave the boy the money he got for that land he sold to Burleigh." he suggested.

"Perhaps." Hi assented, half heartedly. Then, because Tim was busied, in relighting his pipe, the lawyer continued, "hope he sticks to Mildred. She 's a good girl and will be a pretty fine woman one of these days. Phoebe Martin—she 's—"

"S—s—sh!" Tim interrupted, in whisper's tone. "She 's coming back."

Then he drummed the table, and attended to the board. The game continued, at the same time that Phoebe came to the bar, and cleaned it with a cloth.

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The "men", circular ivory pieces, were dropped with a dead thud; both half-bald heads were bent over the table; the smoke hung like a cloud over them; Tim's finger-nails tapped the border of the old board; and, Phoebe made the rounds of the room, removing a few glasses, wiping the tables, and throwing together a few papers.

She put on her hat and coat, taken from the cupboard near the bar, and came and leaned on the back of a chair at the cronies' table. For a minute, in silence, she watched the game, and then suddenly went toward the door.

"If you want more, you can rap on the table. Father will serve you." she spoke, with haste.

Tim grunted a "yes". Hi did not speak, but his eyes snapped meaningly. He gave his comrade a look, as if to say, he would like to administer a rebuke to the girl, for speaking in such a disrespectful tone. She slammed the door, and was gone. Hi jumped, and Tim puckered his fat mouth into a red "O". Hi moved a "man" and "back-gammoned", and, the two, having entangled their legs in those of the table, leaned back in their chairs.

"Women have a temper once in a while. I guess she is mad." said Tim, as he lighted the pipe.

Hi took a stogie out of his vest pocket, and lighted it. The tobacco made him slow, and deliberate, in his talking.

"The Whipple girl—was down at the Farm of the Blue Sleigh—and she came back here—and told this Phoebe—

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that Philip—was making love to Mildred—and Mildred—had helped him to paint the sleigh—and had stayed to dinner—and had spoiled her new black dress—and all that only a few days after Wells' funeral—and Mildred is to pick hops for Mason. I suppose that is why you say the gossips think he is in love with Mildred."

"Yes. And Phoebe is going away!" Tim dolefully added.

"Because she 's mad, I suppose. It 's a way such wild women have, when they can 't have their own way in these love affairs."

Tim looked at his crony, with such an expression on his face, that one would think he had lost every hope and joy of the world. For an instant, he forgot those slippers.

"But, it 's good for her." said Hi. "She and the Whipple girl gossip too much. Mildred Wells is twice as good a girl. Phoebe does n't do anything but coquette with all the eligible young men who come in the tavern. And—" Hi hesitated and smiled. "I do believe she tries the hearts of some of the older and fatter."

Tim's face grew redder, and his anatomy expanded.

"That will do, Hi. How about the quiet thin ones?"

"Oh, Lord, no! Not me! I 've a wife, sir."

"But I have a housekeeper."

Simultaneously, the stogie and the pipe had to be re-lighted.

"Well, come, let 's at it, again." Hi added.

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Bang, bang, bang, went Tim's fist on the table, and landlord Martin came in, as the dice fell, for the first time in the new game.





CHAPTER III

THE HARVEST OF THE HOP

THE HOP vine had been gradually growing up the twelve-foot poles, growing after the manner of twining plants; first sending up a straight shoot, then, as the sun coursed the heavens, reaching around, until it touched and twisted, clinging to the pole, and then, sending up another shoot. So, during spring and summer, it climbed and climbed, and every time it embraced the pole, it seemed to find new life, and hope, and faith, so that it persevered. At times, boys, mostly bent on mischief, and men, who more than made up for them, by their seriousness, came and gave assistance to the vines in their life-task, by tying them to the poles. So that when the summer waned, they had reached beyond the tops, & turned around, again searching in the air for something about which they could twine. For a time, their efforts were in vain. But, every vine, on every pole, in the field, was doing the same, & every day, they were growing more and more, so that, each one of

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them searched over a larger area. So, the hop vine grew.

One morning, in early September, the sun shone down on a field, that appeared, as if, during the past night, the busy fairies & brownies had been there, braiding the hop vines. The shoots, of neighboring poles, had found, what for days, and weeks, and months, they had been seeking. Between every two poles they had reached over and joined together, as if they were clasping hands. Their little tendrils made them inseparable, and the longer they grew, the stronger did they bind themselves to their fellows. So, they clung there, in a fond embrace, and the slower growing shoots climbed up, and followed the path taken by the first ones, until the achene fruit came, sending forth a sedative scent. Then, perchance, on windy days, the laden vines swayed to and fro, and swallows darted up & down the green-vaulted aisles of the hillside hop-yard.

Hop time had come. Ever since spring, handbills, addressed to hop-growers of the county, called their attention to four points for hops to be exported. To obtain the best market price, they were to be clean-picked, not mashed in bailing, thoroughly cured, strongly sewed in square packages, of one hundred and eighty, to two hundred & five pounds. So, the hop handbills stated. The paper was yellow from exposure to the sun; for two months, every literate person, in the village, had stopped before the corner store, and read, and reread, and discussed, with his

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comrade, or himself, that one handbill. It never occurred to any of them that the bills were intended to be torn off, and taken home.

Now, the hop harvesting had come, and the country folk prepared for it, somewhat the same as the Greeks did for their Dionysia. In truth, the god of the hop, was not a bacchanal,—the hop festival was not, by any means, an orgy. It never descended to being an excuse for immorality. But it was a rural revel, and it came when nature was productive, when the vine was ripe, and its odor intoxicating. To the farmers, in the Valley of Gardens, hop picking was a festival of joy and gladness. It was a time when the conduct of mankind was as unrestrained as old-time simplicity and innocence could allow. Then it was that, young and old, servant and master, alike, threw off the more superfluous conventionalities of country life, & gave free rein to their heart's desire. It was the psychological moment for a study of country character, for in its short celebration, there was to be seen more of the follies and vices and virtues than were displayed at any other assembly held in the valley. When they came to pick hops, most of the villagers left behind them the various masks, that their daily business life found them assuming. Their thought was of happiness, and they came to connect that old desirable so much with hop picking, that it is not clear, whether they found happiness there, or came and

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brought happiness with them. All they knew, or wished to know, was that, at the revel, they were happier than at any other time.

Along the roadway, lined with joe-pye-weed, and ele-campane, and dusty, dirty Queen Anne's lace, the hop pickers were hurrying to the Mason farm. Wrinkled old men, in clothes of a common country color, an inimitable combination of black, green and yellow, the goods worn shiny; buxom women, in fine, faded, blue-and-pink prints; merry youths, in blue overalls, and suits of browns and greys; maids, in figured whites, and pinks, all decked in frills and furbelows; people of all sizes, and ages, and stations, all met together, to enjoy a democratic festival, and, incidentally, to pick hops.

Every few minutes, during the evening, a little group, of four or five, would join those lounging about Mason's larger barn & the back kitchen of the white house. Some sleepy ones had already made fine plans for their sleeping quarters, some would-be owls had vowed to sit up all the night.

In the yard, there was a group of noisy, rejuvenated men. They had found, on a row of wooden pegs, in the barn, a number of old, discarded horse shoes; had cut a few stakes, from small white birch logs in the woodshed; and, had improvised the common country game of quoits.

On the barn floor, in the hay, put there for the purpose,

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there was a circle, of old women, telling domestic experiences, and now and then, they were interrupted, by some one of their circle, answering the questions of a daughter, or son, who was being initiated in the hop picking.

Among the billows of the hay, on the low loft, a group of young men, and women, were having a gala time of their lives, exchanging country tales and witty sallies, at one moment, convulsed with laughter, when some one was made the victim of a biting remark; at another, listening eagerly to some story, perhaps not any too true, perhaps not of a very high standard, but, at the same time, not necessarily of a low one.

"Shut up! And let a man sleep, will you?" shouted a man, in the hay, near the young people.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha," laughed the crowd.

Then, one of their number said "s—sh", and after each one had turned, and looked at the tired man, the noise diminished, so that he went to sleep.

An old woman beckoned to her daughter. The girl left the young crowd, and joined her parents. After she had received a whispered scolding, she selected a comfortable spot, and lay down in the hay. Presently, she too, was in the land of dreams.

Thud! Thud!—went the horse shoes, on the ground, in the yard, and then, there followed a shout of the players.

Someone, thirsty, turned the wheel of the pump. The

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noisy chain creaked, and groaned, and hitched, and balked, as if it, also, had been aroused from a happy dream. The stream spouted forth, & after filling the cup to overflowing, it dwindled down to a few rills, and then, finally, to a few drops. Whereupon, the pump resumed its sleep.

When a clever story had been ended, by the old fiction monger, the crowd of young people forgot the tired man, and the "ha, ha, ha" began again. A woman reached over and pulled the sleeve, of the nearest, who happened to be one of the most boisterous, of the young men.

"Won't you try and not make so much noise? You woke up my little girl."

The laughing stopped, with a great deal of difficulty. A few "ha, has" would burst forth, in spite of them. But a whisper passed, from one to the other of the crowd, and again, they were temporarily quiet.

As the light died away, over the hill, back of the house, the new arrivals were fewer, & came at longer intervals;—a couple, from one direction,—a man, from across the fields,—a boy, from the riverside,—a little girl, with her parents, from the village.

A human being, whom, for purposes of identification, we are compelled to call a man, came up the road. He had tramped fourteen miles, since sunrise. He wore black trousers, that were more baggy than usual, because they not only had been slept in, but they had been made for a

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fatter man; heavy boots, that seemed to overweigh him, like a prisoner's chains and ball; and a brown swallow-tailed coat, with the sleeves turned up, showing the ragged lining, at the wrists. His black, flannel shirt, was open at his thin neck; he had been so many days unshaven that it was doubtful whether he intended to have a beard; and added to all that made him unkempt, were the numerous layers of dust that, during his fourteen mile walk, had been heaping up on his sallow skin.

He stopped near a hungry group, at the kitchen door. Some of them moved aside, as it seemed, to avoid rubbing against him. He took off his slouch hat, and, holding it in the same hand with his bandana-bound bundle, stood near the crowd, in an abject attitude, and waited for something to eat.

Over the heads, of those being supplied at the door, the innkeeper's daughter, Phoebe, called to him, and he went toward the window, at which she stood.

If, at that moment, he had happened to look toward the door, he would have met, gazing at him, what might have appeared to be, a pair of wolf's eyes. They were sharp, and piercing, and somewhat wild, and, because the owner of them stood in such a position in the doorway, the lights, in the kitchen, in all probability helped to increase their wolfish look.

But, the man peered intently at Joel, only for a minute.

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Then, he moved out of the light and by reason of the semi-darkness, became temporarily lost in the crowd.

Someone, in the dark, rudely jostled by the wolfish man, turned and looked at him, and exclaimed to a neighbor, "Hi Hosmer! What is he doing here?"

An instant later, Joel's shoulder was shaken by him, as he tried to push past him. When the trampish-looking fellow had granted his pardon, by a grunt, Hi did not pass on, but stayed by his side, and occasionally was pushed, by some of those eagerly seeking food, so that his clothes came in contact, with those of the gaunt individual, with the swallow-tailed coat.

"Hello, Joel. I'm glad you came." Phoebe addressed him, as he walked in the light near the window.

At the same instant, Hi Hosmer leaned down, as if he had dropped something. He thereby escaped being seen by Phoebe.

"Did you get my letter?" Joel asked.

"Oh, yes." she answered, as she held out a large piece of bread, and the whole leg of a chicken.

"You're well? And all the Berlin people?" she shouted.

When she began her answer, the crowd, at the kitchen door, began to shout, and push, and blow whistles, and ring bells; and it took all the strength, of Phoebe's voice, to make Joel hear her. For an answer, he nodded his head, and, feeling his hunger, took a bite of the chicken.

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"Wait for me, before you go to sleep, to-night. I've got lots to tell you." Phoebe again shouted, as she went away from the window.

The word "Berlin" seemed to have had an electrical effect on Hi Hosmer. He jumped—so that it was noticeable, to most of those near by. Then he turned about, and having slipped his way through the crowd, was lost in the darkness.

Joel was too much absorbed by Phoebe's talk, to have his attention attracted by a sudden movement, of the people, about him. Perhaps, too, he was kept in a happy ignorance, by the rush, that came at the same time as Hi's exit. For, then, the hungry people fought their way, in and out of the kitchen, where they helped themselves to the food, that was spread out on the tables.

With his satisfying bread and chicken, in one hand, Joel pushed his way through the crowd, to the sleepy pump, laid down his hat and bundle, and gave the wheel a few turns. The pump seemed to resent the awakening, and only gulped out a few splashes of water. Joel caught enough of them to fill the cup, and let free the pump handle. It jumped back to a comfortable position, trembled a little, and settled to sleep. A few, big, cheek-filling bites, and hasty chewing, ended Joel's meal. Then he picked up, and put on, his hat, stuck his bundle under his arm, left the tin cup where he had dropped it, & mingled with one

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of the numerous groups, that had come from the kitchen. Having found his social place, he was conspicuously alone no more.

With the sombre character, of the tramp, in the swallow-tailed coat, came the black of the early night.

A few couples strolled away from the rest. A young man had found an attraction in some young woman. He started on his country courting, & she returned her country coquetry, while wandering down the road, in darkness, with hopes of sitting alone in lover's moonshine, on the rail of the distant bridge.

In the yard, a bon-fire was started, as a light for the quoit players. As they moved about, their shadows, on the house, grew, from ordinary men to awful giants, that overtopped the peak of the roof, and reached into the highest trees.

A few lanterns were allowed in the hands of the elders, amongst the hay of the barn. But, their rays were scant, and weak, as if hidden under a dilapidated bushel.

The rear end, of the white house, was ablaze with brilliant lamps, while the front preserved that dignity, and darkness, that seems to keep country people from opening the front door, and that part of the house near it, save in times of funerals, and weddings.

In the barn, the number, and volume, of voices of the old woman's domestic circle, were diminished, and there

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were a good many, who were comfortably stowed away in the hay, and were sedulously courting sleep.

The young people's group had stolen out of the barn, and, in the field, that declined to the river, were singing homely songs.

Near by, the children had been playing on the cleanly-painted, old Blue Sleigh, and now, they were being sorted out and pilotted off to quiet sleeping places by their respective mothers.

In the yard, by the house, the metal rang out sharp & clear, when the horse-shoes of the quoit players, struck together. Occasionally they fell to the ground, or struck the wooden peg, with that dull thud. However, the novelty of the game, had worn off, and no shouts announced the skill of the player.

When the full moon came over the mountain, it was late in the hop picker's night. The valley is so narrow—only a mile from hilltop to hilltop—and so deep, that the moon is always later, and shorter, in its blessing than in a level country.

The old woman's group was scattered about, sleeping. The young people, having returned to the hay loft, were telling ghost stories, and, because they were ghostly, the sleepers were not disturbed, as often as they had been, earlier in the night. Only an occasional exclamation, from one or two, made one of the restless old people sit up, and

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reprimand them very crossly, for their foolish "rumpus".

The snoring, of some, bothered those awake, more than the talk bothered those asleep. The snores would rise & rise, by sort of a chromatic scale, until they reached a climax, then the snorer would shift his grotesque position, and begin the scale again. That would not have been very disturbing, had it not been that there seemed to be rivals, each at opposite sides of the barn, & when one had reached the highest pitch, the other would begin; or, occasionally, the two would chance to begin together. Not being accustomed to sleeping in groups, of a great number, there was, to most of those present, something exciting and remarkable, in a snoring duet.

The children had said their little prayers, singing them, as it were, in a tone, that had anything but reverence and awe in it; and now they were sleeping, snug and safe.

A tin horn squeaked and gibbered, like a ghost; a bell tinkled sadly. The fire, in the yard, was a black, wet pile of ashes, and charred corn stalks. In the light of the moon, the house was too light, in one part, and too dark, in many others, so that it appeared not a little uncanny. Down by the river, a whippoorwill ceaselessly sang its "note of wail and woe". Across the valley, a dog barked. The rattling boards of a wagon, sounded, up near the village.

Save for the few who breathed hard, the stillness suggested that of a hundred other sleepers, in the old, village

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graveyard. Death, who presided over the dreamless, was so like her sister and copy here, that they might have been twins. But then, these hop pickers, while they slept a temporal sleep, dreamed something of what they lived.

Here, was a curly-haired, little fellow, in a land of candy, riding a plump, little Shetland pony. And he only had to reach out his hand, to seize from all the dainties of his heart's desire. Should we have awakened him? Here, on the arm of a woman, poor & lowly, lay a little girl, dreaming that her drunken father, and weak mother, were both turned into oxen. Should we have shouted, and awakened her? Here, with her arm above her mother's head, as if she were threatening her, was Phoebe, dreaming she had, by her coquetry, won the love of Philip. Ought we not to have awakened her? Here, was a man, who had rolled, face downward, into the valley between the hay, and the side of the barn. In his dream, he was crawling through a narrow passageway, toward the room full of gold. Did he awake, before he got it in his hand? Or, after? Here, was the young forester, walking down a beautifully shaded road, with deep forests at the sides. He met a man, and the man called him master-forester. Should we have stopped up the mouthpiece of his father's old tin horn, and allowed him to sleep on? Here, lay a poor wreck of life, dreaming he was in a crystal-palace barroom. Around him were the blood-sucking vampires of "good fellow-

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ship", the glasses ran over, with sparkling wine, and toasts were given, and healths drunk. Would it not have been well, if Joel had been one of those dreamless sleepers, in the cemetery, up the valley? Here, was Mildred, sleeping beside her mother, and dreaming of eternally long, dusty roads, over which she had to walk, while back of her a man on a pale horse, seemed to pursue her. Here, was a woman, dreaming she held the record for fast hop picking; here, another, dreaming that she had married the old bachelor, Tim; here, a younger one, dreaming of that new, black, silk dress, that her sister had sent to her; here, a young man, dreaming of a theatre, in the city; another, dreaming of the business at the grist mill; here, a little boy, who had been terrified by the end of one of those ghost stories, he dreamed a nightmare.

Two long blows, of a shrieking horn, aroused the many sleepers, and started talking a few, who had kept their words, and were awake.

It was early morning, every minute becoming darker than on a moonless night. In the west, the inverted moon was low, and shed a weak light, as it seemed to be sinking, through the trees, on the hill. The talking grew louder and louder,—by ones, and twos, they stretched their limbs, and arose.

Those, of the young people, who remained in the barn, slid off the hay to the floor; first, the young men, with a

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great noise, made by their boots on the boards; then, the girls, with a little cry, dropped into the arms of a strong, young fellow, who seemed to be the only one, to whom they all trusted themselves.

A few lights, back of drawn curtains, appeared in the house; the chairs made an unusual noise, when they were moved; and doors shut with a great bang.

Philip stopped beneath the front, spare, brown-room, window, called to Mildred, and receiving an answer, he added, "you will pick with me, at the shed near the road-way. Father has chosen a place for your mother."

A man's gruff voice, then became audible above that of Philip and the rest—he was directing someone to the shed, where the knives for cutting the hop vine, were kept in a box.

In the hay, a daughter called to her mother, asking for her gloves; a young man groped about, seeking his hat; a little child, timid in the darkness, perhaps seeing his nightmare on the walls of the barn, clung to the hand, or skirt, of his parent, and sleepily asked when it would "be day".

The child was not the only one who seemed to awake from a nightmare to find one before his face. For a time the elderly people were much puzzled by an old, gray-haired, bearded hunchback, who had suddenly appeared on the scene. No one seemed to know him.

"If it was n't for his beard and his hump I'd think that

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was old lawyer Hi Hosmer." one suggested to the group.

"Hi went home last night. He did n't come to stay to the picking." another added.

"I wonder who that hunchback is?" a third asked, evidently not having heard the others.

"He 's probably a stranger in town. Mason had a hard time getting pickers."

"Is n't he the father of Mason's shepherd boy Josey?"

"Right you are." hastily agreed another.

"Of course!" a few others chimed in.

So it was that the hunchback seemed to have been identified to their satisfaction, and, most of them, not having any acquaintance, other than the most superficial, with Josey's father, they called the old stranger by the name of Hood, & treated him as if he were no other than the man they thought him.

When the first rays of daylight reflected, from the night clouds overhead, a soft, white light over the land; when the clouds, of mist, were lifting and floating up the valley; when the crows were out for an early breakfast, and the cocks crowing sounded as if there were a rivalry, in discovering the first streak of light; from the barns & house of the Farm of the Blue Sleigh, all the hop pickers were hurrying along the road, and into the hop field.

Some fine dresses were torn on the barbed-wire of the fences; in one place, the board, at the top, was broken off,

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so as to allow the old women to enter the hop yard, with more dignity, than the fence climbers; and, in a quiet corner, blankets were arranged for the sleepy children.

Sunrise found them busy as bees — men and women moving about — poles coming down, before the advancing workers, like lines of soldiers, falling in a stubborn resistance. At the sheds, shaded by a burlap hood, four, and sometimes six, worked with gloved hands, drawing the fingers, like coarse combs, along the vine, to tear off the fruit. The children had been awakened by the bright sunlight, and, stimulated by the scent of the hops, were romping about. At one shed, two young men had formed an agreeable companionship with two of the girls. Compliments, jokes, & sentimental talk, were being exchanged. At another shed, one of the old crones propounded a conundrum, and the other five worried their brains, until they tired, and gave it up. At another, Grace was picking faster than the rest: she had her first box partly filled, and the men were prophesying that she would fill more than three boxes, before the day was over. At another, little Rob was being encouraged by his mother. The bottom of his box was not yet covered, tears stood in his eyes, and he leaned over, every few minutes, to envy the half-full box of a neighboring man. Old Bill Hale had made a big, ugly gash in his thumb, while, with one of those sharp knives, he had cut the vine from the pole. Disheartened,

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he lay stretched at full length, on some sacks in the shade. The sedative influence of the hop odor made him sleepy, and, to him, his chances for the day appeared lost. Someone told him to go down to the river, and drop in, and he would feel better. He grunted, turned over, and went to sleep. No one bothered him further.

It happened that Philip's early-morning call had been overheard, and when the forester and Mildred met at the roadside, near the shed at the east end of the line, they found, there, Phoebe and Joel, her hop-picking flame, a probable patron of her father's bar.

Philip hesitated, and Mildred looked at him, as if she was surprised; then, they walked in the yard & approached the shed. Phoebe and Joel had taken places opposite one another, and it was left for Philip and Mildred to do the same. Before he had time to inquire for her wish in the matter, Mildred took the place beside Joel, so that the place beside Phoebe was the only one left for the forester.

At first the coquette seemed to be in the gayest of spirits, because she had succeeded in securing a place beside the forester, but after the exchange of a few formal words, which the circumstances made necessary, a silence fell over the four; and their work, and the occasional conversation it elicited, was the only thing that broke it.

Philip leaned over, in his effort to see how well Mildred was getting along. He smiled at her, she was encour-

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aged, and a faint flush of excitement rose to her cheeks.

"She can't pick as fast as I can." Phoebe spoke up, turning to Philip.

"You mean as fast as you used to. Do n't you?"

"I have never picked before, Phoebe." said Mildred.

Phoebe did not attend to Mildred's answer, but spoke to Philip.

"See what a lot I have done already."

"Yes." Philip answered, without looking at them.

She glanced out of the side of her eyes at him. Coquette that she was, she wished him to lean over, and look in her box, as he had done, to encourage Mildred. She thought that she could have kissed him, before he could safely have drawn away from her. How she wished he had done it. Now that there was no such opportunity, she was sure she could have caught him unawares. To the others in the hop - yard, a kiss of her's would have meant a great deal; it would have helped to make them believe, that, in Phoebe, there was some attraction for Philip. And just now, one of her greatest desires, was to have, what she seemed unable to gain, some public exhibition of, at least, a feeling of friendliness, toward her, on the part of the son of the master of the hop yard. Then too, perhaps, a kiss given to Philip, might have hurt Mildred, and that would give her an unalloyed pleasure. Then she thought of the gossip about them, the gossip that tongue-wagging Mary

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Whipple had sent on its erratic career. She knew that Philip did not like Mary, for Mary had taken pains to tell her so, and while she waited a chance to make it appear, to all, that her coquettish ways were not without an influence on Philip, she tried to draw his attention to her, by a futile attempt to annoy him.

"Is Mary Whipple here, to-day?" she asked Joel, in a low tone, as if she did not intend Philip and Mildred to hear.

"Mary Whipple?" Joel asked, gruffly.

"Yes, Mary Whipple. Do n't you remember, she met you at the bridge when you came for me?"

"Oh, yes. Yes, she 's at work up the field. She said she was going back home when this hop picking is over." Joel answered.

"Everybody will miss her so much. Do n't you think so? She is such a sweet girl."

"Hops!" shouted Joel, not answering her question, and evidently not caring whether Mary went or stayed; in fact not caring, at present, for any girl, except Phoebe.

In answer to Joel's call, one of the men who were cutting the vine from the poles, came with an armful of unpicked hops. He looked into Mildred's box, before he went back to his work.

"Good," he said. "You will beat them all, if you keep it up. It 's easier now, is n't it?"

Phoebe was leaning over, whispering to Joel. When

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she overheard what the vine cutter said to Mildred, she turned to her work, and hurried, as fast as she could. She was determined to do better than Mildred, and the confidence she had in her own ability, because she had held the record at the last year's picking, made her hope to accomplish her purpose. But she did not stop to think that Mildred was not picking hops, a year ago, and, a year ago, the village coquette did not work at a shed with the man Joel opposite. Therefore, her zeal did not last long, and she might have easily foreseen the failure of her jealousy.

"Hops." she called, in a matter-of-fact tone.

The vine cutter brought an armful. In dropping them in the box, from which the hop pickers drew their supply, he looked at those she had picked.

"You tear the vine, too much, and put too many leaves in the hop box." he said, when Phoebe looked inquiringly at him.

"Do I?" she asked, crossly.

"Yes." the man responded, and walked away.

That little comment made Phoebe's cheeks burn, and took the spirit out of her. She seemed to have forgotten Mildred, and the desire to hold the hop record. Then, too, she suddenly remembered that Philip had given no visible signs, that the talk about Mary Whipple had even been heard by him. For an instant, she thought that, perhaps she had really talked to Joel, in such a low tone, that the

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forester had not overheard all what she intended him to.

Joel looked at her and saw there was something wrong. Phoebe looked at Joel, and stopped picking.

"Let's stop and take a walk," she spoke up.

"All right," he grunted.

"We'll go partners on what we have picked."

"All right, and you can have the ticket," said Joel.

She pulled off her gloves, and tucked them in her belt. Joel lifted up his box, and emptied his hops into the box containing Phoebe's. There was more than a box full, but he brushed the additional ones off to the ground. The ticket man gave him a ticket, which he put in his pocket, and one of the helpers emptied the hops into a bag, & picked up what he could, from the ground. Phoebe and her Joel climbed the fence, and went strolling down the road.

Philip gave a sigh of relief.

"She bears no love toward you," he said.

"No. She is a funny girl. She has always seemed to dislike me." Mildred answered him, in a whisper, so that the other men, near by, could not hear.

A little silence followed. Then Philip called Henry, the vine cutter, and whispered a few words to him. He went off, toward the other end of the hop picking line, and anon returned, nodded his head to Philip, and went to answer a near-by call for hops.

Philip looked at the box in front of Mildred. It was full,

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and she stood there, still, idly looking toward her partner.

"Ticket!" he called.

"I was going to ask what to do." said Mildred.

The ticket man came, and having changed the boxes, taking aside the full one, he gave Mildred a ticket.

"First box!" he shouted.

Mildred clapped her hands to her ears. Immediately, the helping men, and the pickers, all along the line up the field, stopped their work, and turned their heads, to look at Mildred. A great buzz arose, as they called to one another, and talked about the Wells girl. And added to their greatest effort of making a noise by their voices, they drew from pockets and waists, tin whistles and small bells, and immediately all the hop-yard resounded with a Babelish noise and confusion.

"Such a noise." Mildred, excited, called to Philip. "And they all look at me, as if they would tear me to pieces, or eat me."

Philip laughed.

"They are envying you your quick hands." he replied.

Then, without any warning, a good many of the girls, at the other sheds, were seized up in the arms of the men, dropped into the boxes upon the hops, and left to climb out, as best they were able.

At the same time, a young man and woman approached Philip's shed, and as they did so, Mildred retreated to

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Philip's side, as if he would be her protector, and save her from their frolics. But, instead of following her, and putting her in the box, as she expected, they stopped & asked Philip's permission to take the places formerly occupied by Phoebe and Joel.

"You know Mildred Wells, do n't you?" Philip asked.

"Oh, yes." both answered. "We all went to school together, did n't we?" the young man asked.

"Yes." Philip replied.

"It seems good to be together again." Mildred ventured, as she took the vacant place beside Philip.

Fred looked at Rose, and they exchanged smiles.

"It seems quite natural." Fred added. "You see we have been engaged some time, now."

"Oh, is that so? Well, that is fine. I noticed you were pretty much together." said Philip. "I thought I saw you last night, going down toward the Wilson-hollow brook."

"Oh, that reminds me." Fred exclaimed. "When down there we heard something you are interested in."

"What was it?" Philip asked. "Some of the late gossip?"

"Oh, no. About your forestry."

"My forestry?"

Fred glanced around and seeing one of the vine cutters near by, motioned toward him.

"Henry." Philip called. And the man came to him. "Go up and see where that fellow is, who picked with Phoebe."

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Whereupon, the man walked away, and Fred continued. "We were sitting near the Hollow brook, & neither of us had said a word for some time. We heard the voices of some couple on the bridge, and listened. It seemed that they were talking of injuring some trees, either by flooding, or by scattering salt on the ground. They were trying to decide which plan to follow. And just as they were about decided Rose coughed, and they heard her. Then they moved away, and we heard no more. Of course, we knew they probably meant your trees, down the river."

"Do you know who they were?" Philip asked.

"That we could n't find out. But I think I would know the man's voice, if I heard it again."

"You do?"

"Yes. I'm sure." Fred asserted.

Just at that instant, the vine cutter returned from the upper part of the field, and addressed Philip.

"That fellow is n't picking, and neither is Miss Phoebe."

Then, as he turned away, he exclaimed, "here they're coming, and they expect to get their old places."

The four became absorbed in their work, and Philip and Fred began telling experiences.

As Joel came up and saw their places had been taken, he grew angry, called to the vine cutter, and said he "had the right to that shed." The vine cutter replied to the effect that, they had forfeited their places by going away,

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without notice of an intention to return; and now, if they wanted to pick, they would have to go up the field, to the other end of the working line, where there was plenty of room for them. Finding the man resolute, Joel led the way and Phoebe, who had threatened not to pick at all, followed after him.

"Did you notice that man's voice?" Philip asked of Fred.

Philip and Mildred stared at Rose and Fred, and waited, in silence.

"By Jove, come to think of it, it sounded familiar. I do believe I would swear he was the man." Fred exclaimed.

"Well, I would n't be surprised." said Philip. "You see, father has to take in almost anyone at hop picking time, especially when the crop matures as quickly as it did this year, and, in that way, a good many uncertain people get employed,—a good many people who do n't belong to the village; tramps, and hermit hunchbacks, and heaven only knows what."

"Speaking of hunchbacks, there's one here, now. He's up there." Mildred spoke up.

Philip looked where Mildred indicated, and saw the old, grey-haired man, leaning over a bag, packing hops. At the same time, Mildred put her hand on his arm.

"Come up with me and talk to that hunchback. He's quite wonderful. I talked with him last night." she added.

"Oh, you know him, do you?" the forester asked.

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"Yes, very well. Will you come? He 's so wonderful."

Philip turned toward Fred and Rose, upon which Mildred, guessed his intention, and added, "leave them alone. They 're engaged. Come with me."

Whereupon Mildred and Philip went up the field, and when they were at a distance from their shed, she spoke.

"I did n't want them to come with us. It 's just as well they do n't know. The hunchback is "uncle" Hi Hosmer."

"Is he? What 's he here for?"

"I really do n't know. But I 'm sure he has been watching that Joel and Phoebe."

"Good. He 's just the one to stop the fellow from putting salt on the trees. We 'll tell him to."

About noon, a little group of the pickers would agree to stop, and have something to eat. Then, after informing the ticket man of their intention, so that he would reserve their places, they would go to the side of the roadway, where the food was given out by Mason, standing on a wagon; and, after eating their fill, and drinking from the dipper, in the barrel, they would resume their places, and continue the work.

After the four at Philip's shed had had their noon meal, and were returning to their work, Mildred took the opportunity to ask the forester a question, that she had been pondering over, ever since Joel and Phoebe had left the hop field, and Fred and Rose had come to their shed.

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"May I ask what you said to the vine cutter?" she queried, in a low tone.

"You mean when Fred and Rose took the places of Joel and Phoebe?"

"Yes."

Philip looked at her and smiled. Then he answered her.

"I told him to tell Fred that there were empty places at our shed. I thought the others were not entirely agreeable company. I saw they neglected to have their places kept for them."

"Oh, but you should n't have done that just because they were n't friends of mine."

"That 's just why I did it. If they do n't bother you, there will be a great chance of your holding the record to-day."

For two reasons, Mildred's face suddenly flushed, and she became excited.

"I would like to make the record." she finally said.

"And, somehow, I wish I could help you. I wish I could drop the hops I pick in your box."

"I would n't win that way." Mildred gasped.

"I guess you do n't need to." Philip responded.

The hop picking, with its fun and labor, was an absorbing occupation, and, with all the little accidentals to the gathering of a crowd of happy, country people, the day passed rapidly.

At every shed there was, at least, one county wit, and

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he or she, as the case might be, would keep the rest of the little group in jolly spirits, by stories and country-loved conundrums. Occasionally, one of the girls would afford amusement, to a larger group, by an attempt to get out of the hop box, in which she had been dropped, when off her guard; and, in some cases, the older women were the cause of even more laughter; especially when they were unable to extricate themselves, without overturning the box, and rolling out upon the ground. Then, the hum, of the talking, would be pierced by the seemingly unquenchable laughter, or the unearthly blowing of horns, and the ringing of bells.

The boxes were banged together, the poles fell to the ground with a rattle, the leaves shook, and the men shouted danger warnings to some of the frolicking children.

Hour after hour had passed, the day had died away, and the grey of twilight was spreading over the valley, when Mason, on the wagon, sounded the horn, and put an end to the first day of the hop harvest. But the end of the picking did not mean the end of the day's sport. The time of the hop revel had come.

For those, whose limbs were not tired, and senses dulled by the narcotic effect of the hop scent, there was a race down the road to the farm. Those who had been picking together must hold hands, and run in couples. The winners, or definitely, the winning couple, had the choice of

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sheds, for the next day. To the others, who did not race, there came a chance for a stroll, and to all, a rest in the hay, before the horn would announce, that the women in the kitchen had everything ready for the evening meal.

Phoebe and Joel, not having won the race, stopped at the pump for a drink, and shortly after, eluded the rest of their acquaintances, and stole up back of the sheep-cote, to the orchard on the hillside. As they sat there, gazing down on the still, dark valley, only the voices, of the less active, returning hop pickers, came to their ears.

"Mildred Wells will go in with Philip, don't you think?" Phoebe asked.

"Guess so, if they 're engaged." Joel answered.

"Well you wait and see. I bet you it's true. Mary told me all about their love making at the Blue Sleigh."

"All right, may be it is true. I do n't care." Joel responded, rather gruffly.

At that instant, a sound, made by a movement of the boards, drew their attention to the direction of the sheep-cote. They jumped to their feet, and listened. Joel reached down, and picked up a stone.

"It's a fox, after the sheep." Phoebe whispered.

Joel stood peering toward the sound, and his arm swung free, ready to hurl the stone.

Although the night was dark, and the moon had not begun to rise over the mountain top, still it was possible

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to distinguish the doors and windows of the sheep-cote. They appeared like dark, black rectangles, defined against a lighter shade of a background. As for the rest of the scene before them, the trees, & buildings, and foreground, melted into an unvaried darkness.

The crack, of a match, caused Phoebe to start, & simultaneously Joel's arm shot forth. With a thunderous noise, the stone struck the side of the sheep-cote. Then a flame in the doorway blazed up brightly, and outlined the figure of a grey-headed, bearded hunchback, lighting a stogie.

"Look out, there! Be a little careful." he called into the dark, as the match burned out.

"Damn it! The old fool scared me." Joel exclaimed.

Then there was a few bleats from the sheep, and a few tinkles of a bell, and all was quiet.

"What do you suppose he was after in that sheep-cote?" Phoebe asked.

"Do n't know. Unless he came from the barn that way. The old fool, he might have had his head broken."

"I hate those deformed monsters. There 's something weird and uncanny in their actions." Phoebe added.

Joel laughed. "Do n't be a lily-livered girl. Those old fellows are n't monsters. Their bodies make them more human than straight folks."

"But it seems funny for a man to be smoking in there. You do n't suppose he has been listening to us? Do you?"

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"Listening! What would he hear?" growled surly Joel.

"He might have heard of those trees, if he had been down by the Hollow, last night."

"What do I care, if he does hear. There 's no harm in just playing a joke."

Phoebe started toward the house.

"Do n't go. Let 's sit here, alone." Joel called.

"I 'm going back. I 'm hungry." Phoebe answered, inventing an excuse to get away.

Joel had just started after her, when the supper horn sounded, clear and cutting, in the night air. Following it, came shouts, and horn blowing, and bell ringing, from all directions.

"Will you go in with me?" Joel shouted.

Phoebe answered "yes", and then, when she heard Joel hurrying after her, she ran until she neared the kitchen.

In a manner, sharply contrasted to that of the night before, they gathered near the door. Hidden in dark corners near the back of the house, everyone seemed to have been waiting for the signal to leap forth, and, before the echo of the horn had been buried under the volume of noise it aroused, a crowd of hungry men, and women, and children, came forth, as if they were so many sprites and goblins, answering the call of a master demon. The revels of the ancient Dionysia itself could not have made more of a pandemonium. The Brocken has never heard the like.

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Most of them, having worked hard from sunrise to the sunset, wanted something nutritious to eat; but there was, to all, another interest in the evening meal—an interest that more than made up for any chance lack of ravenous appetites, or, for a time, caused the hungry to forget their hunger.

There was a hop-picking custom, that made it a match-making time. If a young man and woman worked at the same shed all the first day, and then, went together, into the evening meal, they were considered to be partners for the whole time of the hop picking. But, that was not all. From the custom a marriage often resulted; at least it resulted so often, that it was the obvious end.

That, accounted for all those Sunday clothes worn by the young people. As in an Eastern land, their parents did not have to hang a doll in the window, to announce that there was a marriageable young woman in the house; they dressed them up, like dolls, and sent them to the hop picking, and, ten to one, they came back with a prospective husband.

After Joel and Phoebe, and many other couples, had gone in, the people watched, and waited for Mildred and Philip, and, because of the gossip, they expected to see the forester, and the holder of the day's record, enter the room, arm in arm, and take their places, side by side at the table.

"What 's become of the hunchback?" someone asked.

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"He told me he was going back home to-night." He answered the questioner, as he took a seat at the table.

"Hello, Hosmer. You here? I thought you did n't pick hops." the man next to him addressed him.

"I do n't pick. I just had a little business with Mason, and I thought I'd join the merriment for once."

"Where did the hunchback come from?" another asked.

"The hunchback! Oh, he lives over Mount Henry way. I think he's a hermit. His name's Hood, I've heard. His boy, was taken away from him, after his wife died, and the little fellow tends sheep for Mason. He's Josey."

Near the head of the table, sat the young people, and a few places were not yet taken. Phoebe, after the manner of a coquette, was suffering from a cough, which, by its frequency, attracted the attention of the whole room; Joel was paying her the most gallant attentions, that his ugliness would allow; and Mary Whipple sat, seemingly tied up in a bow knot, trembling, and gazing at the door, as if her life depended on the outcome of the incident.


A little disturbance occurred at opposite doors of the big room. Whereupon, Philip, with his sister, entered from the hall, and Mildred, with her mother, entered from the yard. The older people followed, filling the empty seats.

Phoebe lost control of her cough, Joel's face wore a sickly smile, and Mary Whipple seized the glass of water before her, & did not stop drinking until she had emptied it.



CHAPTER IV

THE INN IN REPOSE

N HIS favorite chair, in the corner of the Golden Dog barroom, old Tim sat waiting. From his mouth, held in "o" shape, he compelled clouds of smoke; he jumped, scattering tobacco from his pipe; and listened, when he thought he heard a noise outside; and waited and sighed; & sighed & waited. The clock struck seven, the strokes seeming to hesitate, as if it were undecided as to the propriety of sounding.

The room was peaceful and quiet—the lull that traditionally precedes a big storm was present. There was no clatter of dishes in the air; Tim could not hear the chambermaids, running through the halls, and jingling their keys; there was no continuous creak of the floor, no plashing of poured-out liquors, no hum of voices, no boisterous laughter. The noisy monster of a tavern seemed to be in a state of recuperation, as if he had gone through some violent sickness, & had taken the time, between one eve-

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ning and the next, for his much needed convalescence.

The quiet reminded one of a city street, deserted in the early morning, when, as a famous sonnet has it, "the very houses seem asleep"; when one's footfalls are the principal sound, until the milk wagon, with its cans, and iron-tired wheels, and the horse hoofs, comes and makes a thunderous racket. Perhaps, a newsboy, like a gruesome gnome, or a corpulent policeman, like a Brobdingnag, steps out from his dark doorway, and mixes his footfalls with yours. Perchance the boy calls to you "papers, sir?" His voice is magnified to an unusual loudness, and, at the same time, an eery, ghost-like, weird feeling creeps over you; so that, for a time, you almost question whether the boy is human, or a sprite, or goblin.

At such a time, the serenity of the place seemed almost miraculous. Having become accustomed to, and having associated with it, the noise, that usually accompanied it, the peaceful, undisturbed condition, was made most conspicuous and impressive. Then too, there seemed to be, in the beholder, a subtle expectancy of the noise that was about to come. Similar, was the tranquillity, that was forcibly brought to Tim's notice, when he sat alone, in the barroom, and waited for his crony.

Although one might think it paradoxical, still the fact was, that on this night, the quiet barroom seemed to have about it an air of reverence. None of the jarring discords

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of the tavern life and gayety, were present. A reverential solemnity had, temporarily, stolen over the place, & Tim was deeply conscious of it. As far as companionship was concerned, he might as well have been in a desert solitude, or in a tomb, with the silent dead around him.

He moved his chair. The noise made him jump, and look toward all the doors. Evidently, the man's nerves were beginning to "play the devil" with him. Again he jumped, almost to a standing position. Thump, thump, thump, thump! came to the old bachelor's ears; whereupon his face took on an expression, as if he expected that a grinning, bone-rattling skeleton, wrapped in a winding-sheet, would enter.

Into the room, from the kitchen, came Martin,—a big, fat smile. When he saw Tim was alone, he came toward the old crony's table.

"Do you think Hosmer will come to-night?" he addressed him, as he smoothed out his all-enveloping apron, and stood, with a hand on Hi's chair, and the other at his hip.

"Yes, he ought to be here now. I saw him this forenoon and he said he expected to come."

"Phoebe tells me he was at Mason's the first night."

"Yes."

"What kept him away from here since the hop picking?"

Tim moved about in his chair, uncomfortably.

"Oh." Tim hesitated. "Business. Business." he finally

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blurted out; at the same time, looking around carelessly.

Martin plainly saw, that the old gentleman was not anxious to talk of his crony's absence, & he began to suspect that, the two had come to find some fault with the service of the Dog. Therefore, he thought he would try to extenuate matters, and make amends for any possible neglect, by a sudden increment of attention.

"Will you have a drop or two, meanwhile? I mean just as a little dainty bit, from the house."

"Oh, no, thanks." Tim answered. "I guess I'll wait, till he shows up."

Whereupon, Martin noisily went to the register-desk, and brought from it, a pile of newspapers. He dropped them on the bare table, before Tim.

"Perhaps you can find something interesting there. If Phoebe was n't tired out by her hop picking she would entertain you for a while."

Tim blurted out a "thanks", and was silent.

"Well, it wo n't be long before the evening business will begin." Martin added, as he crossed the room, & returned to the kitchen.

Tim snatched up some of the papers and looked at their dates, reading them, aloud, "August—10—17—24—31—September 7." He rattled them, so as to make as much noise as possible. Then, with a bang, he dropped his foot to the floor, and, for a change, crossed his right leg over

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the left. Presently he whistled—just a succession of notes, no tune, no melody, for Tim could not “carry” a tune.

The fire had nearly burned out on the hearth. Acting the part of a Vestal virgin, one of the barn helpers came in, with a handful of kindling. Then, after arranging it on the red-hot coals, he made a number of trips; each time bringing in a log. The last one he swung off his shoulder; dented the mantel; with an oath, threw it on the andirons; unceremoniously kicked the smaller burning wood up beneath the pile; and turned to go out.

“What time is it?” Tim called to him.

“You can see the clock better than I can.” the man answered, as he made his exit.

The spell was broken. Tim’s nerves began to become steadier. The birch speedily took fire, and crackled and flashed up, invitingly. He took up the September 7 paper, and went to one of the high-back seats, beside the hearth. He looked, first at the flames, then at the paper, meanwhile turning the pages with a deal of noise. He wondered where Phoebe was. He wished she would come, and help him in passing away the time. As it had done, on a few former occasions, her company would be a blessing, for the paper was of no interest—he had gone over and over it, last week, even reading the advertisements. All he needed, to make him perfectly happy, was Phoebe’s presence; especially if she sat on the seat beside him. He

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began to think that, perhaps, Hi would not come; for, a whole, slow, quiet half-hour had gone by. It was nearing eight o' clock.

Previous to the hop picking, Hi had been summoned to assist in the search for a robber, @, since the first night, at Mason's, he had not had time to come to the inn. The constable at Berlin, fifteen miles down the valley, sent him instructions, about the details of the robbery of the post-office, among which there was a hint, that the man might stop to pick hops, and thereby try to throw off the scent of the emissaries of justice. For that reason, Hi had been one of the late arrivals at Mason's, secretly attending the hop picking in the disguise of the hunchback. Of course, Tim had shared in his crony's secret, when, at their last meeting, they had given up their customary game, and Hi had sat, and whispered confidingly about the information that he had.

Now, as he sat in the barroom, the old bachelor's gossipy curiosity was aroused; so that he wondered what had happened that Hi was kept away so long. He was made half sleepy by the fire; so that he wished to go home, and to bed; but he sat looking at one conspicuous flame, that had burst forth from the smoke, and he rubbed his eyes, and yawned, and shifted his feet about, with impatience.

The admonitory gravel, on the front walk, made him rouse himself from his revery. Some one was hurrying

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in. Feet were shuffled on the stoop, near the door; Tim, wide-awake, looked up; the door opened wide; and Hi entered, announced by the bang of the closing door.

His long, lanky stride seemed to increase at every step, and it made one suspicious, that, if he were on a very long errand, he might soon outstride the children's-story giants, who thought nothing of a step covering ten miles; or, perhaps, some good fairy had given the man a pair of seven-league-boots, & he was trying them. At least, one feared, that, at the next step, he would split himself up the middle.

Phoebe looked into the room, from the hallway, and seeing that the new comer was Hi, quietly shut the door, and returned up-stairs. Neither of the cronies saw her, but both recognized her step.

"Well! I thought you were going to stay till snow flew." Tim greeted him.

Then the fat bachelor arose, and accompanied Hi to the corner table.

"Guess not." Hi answered, sitting down.

Tim pushed the papers into the chair. Hi stretched out a prodigiously long arm, and pulled down, from the deep window-sill, the checker-and-backgammon board.

"Which will it be? Checkers or backgammon?" he asked, as he opened the board, and took out the dice box.

"Backgammon. I guess." Tim responded, as he selected the white "men" for himself, and left the black ones for

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his crony. "We 'll change colors for luck for this time."

"Did you wait long?" Hi queried, looking in Tim's eyes.

"No, not long. But it seemed like years."

Hi gave a little laugh.

"Everybody seems to have deserted the place."

"I guess there 's no danger of that." Hi assured him.

"I suppose you went prowling around rigged up in that old hunchback outfit of yours."

Hi laughed again. "Yes. It worked so well on the old woman at home, I thought it might do at the hop picking. Fortunately, your catching me at it, showed me where the disguise was weak."

Then both laughed.

"Well, what 's the news?" Tim inquired.

"Considerable." Hi answered.

"Did you get sight of any suspicious-looking individual?"

Hi arranged his "men" for the game, by picking up one, then talking a little, and then placing the ivory disk in its proper place.

"I guess I have track of a man, who possibly may know more than he ought, about those stamps and money. I had to do some careful work. Like all those young fellows at the hop picking, he had a girl."

"Good!" Tim exclaimed.

Then the old bachelor cleaned out his pipe, and while he was refilling it, Hi shook the dice, and began to play.

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"Any news about young Mason?" Tim suddenly asked.

"Oh, no. But lots of talk." Hi responded indifferently.

"Let 's have it, anyway." Tim continued.

"Well, Mary Whipple told it all around that he & Mildred were engaged. So, everybody expected to see them sit at the table together." Hi stopped abruptly.

"Did they?" Tim asked, acting pruriency personified.

"Lord, no. That young forester is n't a fool. He 's got some sense."

"But, how about the girl?" Tim queried.

"Damn it, Tim. You do n't know anything about her. If you had had as much to do with her father as I used to, you would n't think she would go to the table and give that lying Mary Whipple the chance to laugh."

Tim looked at Hi, as if he were afraid, that the lawyer was going to rise up, and put him out of existence; here, in the tavern, the same as he was at home.

"All right, Hi. All right."

Hi was silent, for a minute, and the game continued.

"Oh, I did get one piece of news." Hi resumed.

"Yes?" Tim encouraged him.

"Mildred is going to work in the dairy at Mason's farm."

Tim whistled. Hi gave him a look, that veritably froze his blood, and continued. "That shows you what she is made of, Tim. She is n't afraid to work and she deserves a lot of credit for doing anything she can."

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"Hi," Tim spoke up. "Exactly, how much did Wells leave?"

"I do n't know, Tim. But, outside of the land, it was n't much. And the land is mostly "run-out" pasture."

Hi pounded with his heavy heel on the floor, & Phoebe came into the room, to answer the call. Much to her surprise, Hi looked up at her. When Tim, with a pleasant smile, looked up, he did not meet her fascinating blue eyes, for she was looking at the lawyer. So, in turn, he looked at Hi. Then both watched Phoebe, as she brought their drinks from the bar, and went out the back door. Hi spoke when she was out of hearing.

"Did you notice the girl's eyes, Tim?"

"Dark, and circles around them? Yes." Tim answered.

"Possibly been awake all night, crying." Hi suggested.

"No." Tim answered. "If you had been here when those hop pickers celebrated the end of their season's work, you would know. They spent all their money in drink, most of those fellows did. And one of them got the girl to drink till her father had to carry her off to bed. And, my! When Martin came down stairs, he was so mad he pounded the fellow almost insensible, and then sent him up stairs, to his room, asked the rest to go, and closed up for the night, at half past eight. Crying? By the good saint Bobby, no! Dead drunk! So drunk she would n't even pay any attention to me. I never had such a miserable time in my life."

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The game went on, and Hi asked, rather innocently, as he held the cup, before throwing the dice,

"Do you know Joel?"

"Joel? Joel who?"

"Just Joel."

Tim looked at his crony. Hi met Tim's eyes with his own, small and sharp. Tim had seen just such a light in his eyes before. A thought struck him, and he jumped.

"He is n't the post-office robber, is he?" he whispered.

"Never mind, Tim. Any of the hop pickers, who were strangers, might be. Especially if they hailed from Berlin."

"But who is he, anyway?" Tim asked.

"The fellow who made the girl drink."

"Oh! I see." Then a second thought struck the old bachelor, and he added, "Phoebe took up with him at the hop picking, did she? That 's why she had no attention to give me. Bobby, I 'm glad I went home. Curse his impudence anyway."

"Yes. Just as I told you, she flirts with every eligible man she can."

"Seems as though I was el—i—gible as well as any other unmarried fellow." Tim added.

"Oh, do n't be silly. She wants a man, who is young."

Tim puffed at his pipe, & looked toward the front window. Hi continued. "At the hop picking, she tried to beat Mildred. She could n't come any where near her. Why,

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do you know, Tim, Mildred had never picked before, and she made the record of every day. Gad! I'm proud of her. My children would do as well, if I had my way with them. Phoebe and Mary Whipple said that young Mason put all he picked in Mildred's box. So, some of the men watched him, and they said he did n't give her one."

"Oh, by the way." Tim spoke up. "I saw Mary Whipple just before she went home. She seemed to be surprised that you were at Mason's for the hop picking. And just a few minutes ago Martin spoke of it, too. I guess you excited some curiosity and made some village news."

Hi stopped playing, set the dice cup beside the board, and looked at Tim.

"I thought so. No wonder I did n't get more points on my man. More of Mary Whipple's interfering, and more gossip for that damned "literary" club."

Tim puffed at his pipe, and returned his crony's glance.

"You talk in riddles, Hi. Explain yourself." he drawled.

Hi looked around the room, and leaned over toward Tim. Then, in half-whispered tones, he related the adventures through which he had gone, when he was trying to gain some hint of the Berlin robbery.

He told how he had gone to Mason's, when it was growing dark; how he had stood in the door, and had wolfishly looked over the crowd, until he chanced to find Joel; how he had stood near him, at the window, when he talked to

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Phoebe and obtained the food; how he had moved away from the crowd, when he saw that some of them were surprised, at his presence there; how he had donned his hunchback disguise, and attended the picking; how he had finally succeeded in hiding himself in the sheep-cote; how he became suspicious, from the irrevelancy, to Berlin, of their talk, that Joel and Phoebe guessed he was in hiding there; how, trusting in his disguise, he had come out from his hiding place; had narrowly escaped a stone thrown by Joel, and had hurried off to the house in time to see Joel and Phoebe go to supper together. And, from all the circumstances, he had come to believe that Joel was the man who had robbed the Berlin post-office.

At the conclusion of the narrative of his crony, Tim's lower lip dropped, and his eyes opened wide, both expressions giving him an appearance, extremely suggestive of the wonder-struck curiosity of a baby. Hi resumed the dice cup, and continued the old game. An unusually loud noise, in the hall, made the two turn toward the door. It opened, and Joel entered.

He had a ragged, white handkerchief tied around his head. Peering, from beneath his slouch hat, his sunken, grey eyes showed, by the dark rings beneath them, that he had had a bad night; in fact, they made one suspect he had been in a fight. His clean-shaven face, which had had its characteristics concealed by his scraggy beard, show-

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ed his pointed, weak chin, and gave him an appearance, that truly suggested the phrase "drawn through a knot-hole". His frame, clad in baggy trousers, and swallow-tailed coat, seemed even more wasted by dissipation, than when we last saw him at the hop picking. The only signs, that he was stronger than a boy of his moderate height, were his arms, that showed their shape, because the coat sleeves were tight, and his hands, that were considerably accentuated, by the ragged turned-up cuffs. Those hands and arms indicated, that he could have given to one an iron grip, and could have picked up and carried a good two hundred pounds, were it not for the poor supports of his body.

As he entered the room, Phoebe followed after him, and the two, one slouching along, the other gliding gracefully, went and sat at a table, near the fire.

Pretty Phoebe looked out of place, beside the prodigal Joel. The woman's healthy, fair skin, her light hair, and her delicate, nicely rounded body and limbs, clad in costly, but flashy - colored clothing, rudely contrasted with the poorly-adorned, leathery hide, drawn taut, over a skeleton of a man. True it was that there was the same look in her eyes of blue, and his, of grey—a look that seemed to mean that they had something in common; but then, another sound sleep would lighten up those of the woman; but, not of the man. To the features, of that living skel-

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eton, came the sardonic leer, that lies continually on the mouth of a skull. Joel seemed to be laughing at his own grim fate, and because Phoebe did not give evidence of observing, and noting, it, it made the companionship of them remarkable, incomprehensible, & unseemly. They seemed to be personifications of health and disease. To add, that opposites attract, would, in this case, be a cruel truism.

Joel talked loudly, and Tim and Hi studied their game, in silence, listening to the dialogue of the coquette & her hanger-on.

"You 're not feeling bad, are you?" he asked, looking in her eyes.

Phoebe leaned nearer, and made an indistinct answer. Joel turned, and looked at the cronies. He got up, stopped for an instant, to feel of his head, and came over to their table. Phoebe followed, wondering what he was going to do.

"Say! What are you playing?" he addressed Hi.

"Backgammon."

"Oh, hell! Why do n't you play poker?"

Hi stopped, and looked up at him.

"You 're the village lawyer. Ai n't you?" Joel added, in a sneering tone.

Hi jumped up, and siezed him by the shoulder. Joel's hand went up to his forehead, he was dazed by the throb

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of his headache, and he stood speechless, surprised at the strength in that slight lawyer's body. Tim pounded vigorously on the table, to call Martin.

"You had better go back to Berlin, before you get into trouble." Hi shouted in Joel's face, as he pushed him. Undoubtedly he would have fallen, if the next table had not been near.

"Go to—" Joel started, as he found he was safe on his feet, and Phoebe was by his side.

If Martin had come in, at that moment; and, thereby, had not given Phoebe a chance to use her influence, the climax, to that scene, might have been much worse, than the one, when Martin came down stairs, after carrying drunken Phoebe up to bed. It might have been more unfortunate than ever for Joel; for, after Martin had "had his turn" at him, Hi would probably have arrested him, and sent him to Berlin, to answer for the post-office robbery. It was lucky, that Martin had to put on his shoes, and was delayed by the lacings. For Joel, Phoebe turned out to be a veritable "god from the machine", of ancient tragedy.

She put her hand over his mouth, pulled him toward her, and whispered in his ear. The expression on Joel's face instantly changed, from his aroused anger, to that drawn, sardonic, emaciated look. Hi, calm and collected, sat down, and shook the dice; and Tim, overcome by the

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excitement, looked from one to the other of the men, and did not utter a word. Joel turned away, and followed the master of the situation, Phoebe, as she went into the hall.

The backgammon game continued. Martin entered, and, when he saw both the cronies there, a pleased smile came over his face. Hi gave him an order, for more drinks, and the happy landlord went toward the bar.





CHAPTER V

MILDRED AND HI HOSMER

DOWN THE Valley of Gardens, ran a little, capricious, tetchy river; winding in and out, searching out the most pliant passage, and, somehow, choosing the prettiest. Its source was in the forest-crowned hills to the north, and, after it had bounded on its fickle way, past the Farm of the Blue Sleigh, and through our Valley of Gardens, it went on a course, whose trials and troubles, we leave in a reverent obscurity. What metamorphosis it went through there; whether it vied with Pactolus and its golden sands, or lost itself in the earth, like Alpheus, to rise in some other land, we know not, and have never found cause to investigate.

After its birth, in the northern woods, it gathered its waters, drawn from many score clear springs, and, in a formidable body, started out, with, what appeared to be, a determined purpose, to rush, straight as an arrow, for the southern outlet of the valley. But, it did not keep to its admirable resolution, as long as it wished to.

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Having passed the Wells' land & house, it might have washed and worn away all obstructions, and run along, between the two lines of houses and stores, down past the corner store, and directly through the parlor of one of the village note-worthies.

That, unquestionably, would have been its course, had time been "out of joint", and had the river not been, by nature, fickle. But, in its fickleness, it sometimes became tetchy, and kicked up its heels, so to speak, and went off on some little freak, perhaps, just to show that it had a will of its own. At least, such seemed to be the case, when it came before the Wells' home. There, it went absolutely mad. Perhaps, it took a dislike to the house, perhaps, to the occupants. Be that as it may, in a veritable rage, it performed one of the foolish antics that characterize it.

A solid bed, of sandstone and clay, stood in its way, and instead of gently working away, in a graceful curve, the river stopped, as it were, and then dodged suddenly westward. After struggling and struggling to eat through the southern bank, it ran its freakish course for a half-mile, before it found a weak spot, & working through it, went on its checkered career, leading the eye a wanton chase, down the valley.

As before suggested, the Wells' home stood at the salient of that angle of the river, so that the windows, in the west end of the building, looked out upon a bridge, whose

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roadway had stolen a part of the river's plan, and lead toward the parlor of the village note-worthy. Whether that important person preferred the road to the river, has never been ascertained. The fact is, that the road ran toward his parlor, and when about to penetrate it, it seemed to be impressed by his importance, and very obligingly forked to the east and west, to join the main highways of the valley. Had the river followed out its intention, it is a matter of doubt, whether it would have found the note-worthy's house founded on a rock.

Back at the salient of the river, the Wells' home was situated in a place, that, at times, proved a genuine pandemonium. With the rattling boards, and ringing, iron bars, of the bridge, before it, and the clinking blacksmith shop beside it, the home seemed a place unfit for a scene of peace and quiet; especially, such a quiet as death brings. However, as we have seen, death chose to come to Wells, even though he did live in the noisiest part of the village.

Across the road, in the doorway of his home, the blacksmith sat and smoked, as if he were the toll-gatherer of the bridge. One might think the shop would be quiet, if he saw him sitting there, blowing rings from a half-burned-away pipe, out into the still, hot air. But the Wells' house was not so lucky as to have a quiet existence. Two horses awaited John's pleasure, and stamped and pawed, and kept up the infernal noise of the shop.

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In the side yard, a dog, with tongue dripping, lay on the damp ground beside a pump. When anyone approached him, he did not rise; he just arched his neck, wagged his tail, and pawed the ground.

It was a sultry, cloudy, doubtful day, one that artists call a "grey day", when one has to be prepared for a small shower, or a scorching sun. The air was heavy, and one's clothes were disagreeably adhesive.

Along the roads of the village, and in the fields, few people were doing their work, and no one was so unsympathetic as to drive a horse to his task. Few crossed the old resounding bridge, and, had it not been for those horses stamping, in the blacksmith shop, the Wells' home would have been quiet. That would have been a miracle.

Before her home, Mildred was stooping to gather golden-rod. Her dress made a conspicuous dark centre to a pretty picture; a picture, half house, and trees, and river bank, and half, reflection in the river. The bank, suggestive of the color combination, in an Anatolian rug, was checkered in golden yellows, and greens, and purples, and pinks; and the trees, and red house had, for a background, the aniline green of the mountain. The reflection was a pleasing blur, and blend, of colors, just as if one had stirred them in a tank, as the binders do, when marbling the edges of a book. Ever and anon, a wave of hot air stirred the water into ripples, and took away the quiet reflecting

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surface; thereby blotting out the duplicate of the girl in mourning, and the wild flowers, among which she was selecting the golden-rod.

Hi, on his way, from his little office to the corner store, was crossing the iron bridge. As he glanced toward the red house, he saw Mildred; and, because his footfalls made such a noise, he expected she would look up. But she had become so accustomed to the rumble of the bridge, that she did not attend to it.

"Everybody well, to-day?" he called to her.

Mildred recognized the voice, and looked up.

"Yes, very well, thank you, uncle Hi." she answered, giving the village lawyer the name, by which she had always known him, although he was really no relation.

Then, he crossed the bridge, and turned to go up the little path to the house.

"I might stop in and see your mother about that pasture lot." he added.

Mildred put down the golden-rod, and joined him.

"Mother is up-stairs. I'll go with you and call her."

"I hear you are going to work in the dairy for Mason." said Hi, slowly, and deliberately.

"Yes." Mildred rejoined. "Mr. Mason said he had a place for me, if I wanted it, and I thought I had better try it."

"If I buy that pasture lot of your mother's, you wo n't have to do any work. At least not for some time to come."

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"You would n't pay very much for that "run out" land, would you?" Mildred asked, laughing.

"Well, not very much compared to what I would, if it was a good field."

"And what in the world will you do with it? Father stopped using it three years, I think, before he died. It's just covered with that coarse field moss, and only black-berry bushes can live on it."

"I thought some of having young Mason look it over. He told me he could make any piece of land in the valley give three times the crops they now get from them."

"And you believe he can?"

"Certainly, I do."

"Oh, I'm so glad. I mean, I'm glad you can make good use of that pasture. You see I almost thought you meant to buy it so as to help us—so that I would n't work."

"Lord, no, girl! I would n't have you—I would n't have you go back on your word, when you had agreed to help him. And besides, I guess it will do you good to get well acquainted down at the Blue Sleigh."

"Really, I'm glad to be able to find some regular work to do. I do wish father had made me do it before." she answered him.

For a moment, both were silent.

"Ever since I fixed up those papers of your father's, I have thought that, if he had any weakness, it was that

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he wanted his own family a family of leisure." Hi added.

"Perhaps that 's why everybody thinks it is so hard for me to work."

"Yes." Hi assented.

"But really it is n't hard." Mildred added.

Hi looked at her inquisitively; in fact, in his own mind, he doubted if she spoke the truth.

"Was n't it hard to pick hops? And win the record?" the lawyer asked, craftily.

Mildred laughed.

"Well, it was a little bit. But not very much. Only a little bit."

Then they both laughed, and the sound of their voices echoed from the wall of the blacksmith shop. Soon, she stood at one side, and held the door open, and the lawyer entered the living-room of the house.

He dropped his straw hat on the centre table, and sat in a chair, before the northern window. Mildred excused herself, and went up the stairs.

As she left him alone, Hi folded his arms, and straightened up. He looked across the room, and something unusual, made him open his eyes wider. He cocked his head to one side, and looked inquisitively at it. Then he scowled. Again he looked across the room, and something else attracted his attention. Then he gave a slow, sweeping glance, remarking all the things around the room.

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How strange the place seemed! How it had changed lately! How much more prosperous it looked, than he had expected! The last time he had been there, even the furniture, and its disposition seemed to reflect the gloomy condition of the bereaved household. Lately, the lawyer had settled the Wells' estate, and he had come to believe that the gossip of the village was not far from the truth; that Wells had left little, for the widow and the daughter. But, evidently, all had been deceived, and such a rumor could not be altogether true, for this room looked better than many, in the homes of those villagers, who had expressed unfavorable opinions, of the state of Wells' affairs. Could it be, that all had been duped? And even the lawyer, who had charge of the estate? Had Wells been hiding away some money in a bag, or a stocking, or in a box under the hearth? If he had not, how was it possible that these changes could have been made?

The lawyer's memory had, indeed, failed to serve him faithfully. His enthusiasm over his discovery, of Mildred's attitude toward Philip, had pleased him so much, that he was blinded. It was a fact, that the old lawyer had never been into those two little rooms, adjoining this one. He had never been in both rooms, up stairs. He had been in one, the room in which his friend Wells had died; so that he probably did not recognise the things, that he thought new. For once, Hi acknowledged himself nonplussed.

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As soon as Mildred reached the landing, in descending, Hi looked up.

"Mother will be down in a few minutes." she announced.

"All right." Hi answered. Then casting his eyes about, to take in the whole room, he added, "Who fixed up this room? It looks different than it used to."

"Oh, I did." Mildred answered. "Do you like it?"

Hi pretended to ponder over the question.

"Rather." he answered.

"You see, mother let me change things. She thought perhaps it would not make her quite so sad, if we did not have it the same as father did."

Hi was silent for a minute, then he smiled, and spoke.

"It looks something like a room in that there city man's Mr. Burleigh's."

Suddenly, a tinge of red came into Mildred's cheeks. And Hi noticed it, for he had spoken with a purpose, and, at the same time, had kept his small, sharp eyes riveted on her.

"Does it?" Mildred asked, in a guilty tone, although she tried to answer, as if she were innocent.

"Yes." Hi answered, still looking at her sharply. Then he gave a sly chuckle, for he met her eyes, and saw in them, more than she wished to betray.

Mildred laughed. But to Hi, it did not sound natural. Then she became serious, hesitated, and was silent.

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The lawyer's thoughts ran along rapidly. He suspected that Philip had told her some of the ways of the city man's home, and she had tried to imitate them. Again he wished that his offspring were like her, and, if she would give him the opportunity, he was decided to return her no little praise, and encouragement, just as if she were a child of his. In fact, he would have been easily led, at that time, to declare his interest in her affairs; his partiality; his quasi-paternal wish for her to look with seriousness on the gossip of the village, and to openly avow that she preferred Philip to all others. But, kind as he wanted to be, he was not permitted to lavish his kindness on Mildred; the fact was forcibly borne to him, that he had something, more than his friend's young daughter, to deal with. He could plainly see that the girl understood him, as well as he understood her, and at first, he was inclined to obstinately disappoint her, just because he knew she could guess that he was pleased. Then too, he preferred to be on confidential terms with her, rather than with Philip. To him, there was not an entire absence of awe, at the ability, and hopes, and evident desires, of Mason's boy. There was something about Philip's reputation, that made Hi give no little respect to the forester. Next to Burleigh, he would have been the earliest to recognize any good ability he might show. So that, on the whole, he decided, that it was far better, for him, to be understood by the innocent Mildred.

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To Mildred, the silence seemed overwhelming, and she wondered whether he would ask her if Philip had suggested any of the changes. If he had chosen to speak out plainly, she knew concealment would be impossible.

Luckily, footsteps turned the attention from Mildred and the room, to the stairs. Mrs. Wells came down, and Hi arose, and came to meet her.

Whereupon, Mildred returned to the little river's bank; among the golden-rod. She picked and picked, slowly, trying to make the time pass quicker; for she wanted Hi to come out; so that she could question him, and perhaps learn how much he knew, concerning the changes in the house. She had had time to think it over. She called to mind the gossip of the village, the fact that Hi was a chum of Tim's, that Tim was more or less of a gossip, & when he was not, he was in the hands of one; and, from it all, she became anxious to learn how much Hi knew. That he might be a help, suddenly occurred to her.

The time dragged all too slowly, and she already had more golden-rod, than she intended to pick.

Her mother came to the door, and called.

"Mildred, can 't you come in now?"

"Not just yet, mother." Then, until she was sure that her mother had gone in again, she picked faster than ever.

When she had, half a dozen times, decided to go back to the house, and not say anything to Hi, and had, just as

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many times, thought of waiting "just a minute more", Hi came out, and shut the door, walked down the path to the little, white gate, slowly opened, and carefully closed it, and started through the grass, past the door of the old smithy, toward the road.

"Uncle Hi, I want to speak to you."

Hi, a little surprised, stopped and looked at her.

"Me?" he asked.

"Yes."

He returned across the path, and stopped, near her.

"Well?" he said, and he waited.

"Were you going anywhere in particular?"

"No. Nowhere, of importance, that I know of."

"Do you like flowers—and trees—and all that?"

"Do n't know as I do, especially. But I like them."

"Would n't you like to see a lot of fine young trees?"

Hi broke into a loud laugh. John the blacksmith stared at him, as if he thought the lawyer had become insane.

"A whole acre of them?" he asked rather slyly.

Mildred saw that he understood. Then she half whispered, "Go down and see them. It will encourage him. But do n't tell him I sent you. I'm sure he can fix up the pasture lot. He'll make an Eden of it, if you want one."

"I guess I will." Hi answered. Then he added "I have n't much use for an Eden, but I want a good pasture."

"Promise you wo n't tell." Mildred called.

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"Cross my heart. 'Pon my word and honor." Hi answered, laughing. Then, as he walked away, toward the public roadway, he added, "Still, I might rent an Eden to you."

Then, he sauntered along the road, passing the line of buildings, on the piazzas, of which, the men had collected, to wile away the sultry hours. They were idly lounging about; some had their sleeves rolled up, and their shirts open at the neck, and others sat, tipped back in old chairs, against the wall, or, wiping their wet brows, lolled at full length, on the piazza floor. In response to a friendly word, or nod of the head, from Hi, they swore about the untimely, hot weather, or perhaps inquired why he was out, on such a day.

As the lawyer came around the corner, going toward the east, he met Tim. He had been looking on the ground, and half bent over, happened to see Tim's feet, just in time to avert a collision. The old bachelor was mopping his broad expanse of brow, and fanning himself with an old yellow newspaper.

"Hello, partner." Tim greeted him.

"Hello." Hi responded. "Pretty warm, is n't it?"

"Phew! Yes. I do n't see why we have such weather at this time of the year."

"Where have you been? I thought you would stay at home on such a day as this. You must have had pretty important business to bring you out."

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While Hi was speaking, Tim edged over to the platform, before the corner store, and, still wiping his big, red forehead, he sat down, with a sigh. Hi stood before him, and waited for him to answer.

"I have just been up to see Mrs. Wobbles. You know she 's a neice of Gruber and—"

"No, I did n't know it." Hi interrupted.

"Well you do now. She 's a neice of Gruber, and she wanted to know how he is getting on. Poor Gruber has been pretty near to dying. I went for her—because the doctor said she must n't walk as far as Gruber's."

More mopping, of his forehead, followed.

"It seems to me that Mrs. Wobbles is as able to walk up to Gruber's as you are." said Hi.

Tim looked at Hi, and did not reply.

"And you ought to take better care of yourself on such days as these." Hi added.

"Perhaps I ought."

"You might have sent Farquhar's little boy, and if he could n't go I 'm sure Martin would let Frankie go."

"But, you see, Hi, I did n't think of that. I just went myself."

"Yes. Anyone can see that. You look like a big hunk of melting tallow. You 'd better go down to Gumry's ice-house, and cool off."

"I was thinking very seriously of going home."

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"You 'll find it too warm, there." said Hi, meaningly.

The old bachelor was silent.

"And so, Gruber is sick again, is he? I guess we would n't miss him much if he really died." Hi exclaimed.

"Oh, do n't say that, Hi. He 's a good old soul."

"Good? Perhaps so. But he tells bad stories to all the village boys."

"Oh, Hi, you do him an injustice. Indeed you do."

Hi looked sharply at Tim.

"You know perfectly well that a boy never passes Gruber's door but the old man has to tell him some disgraceful story. And if the boy refuses to stop to hear it, he just shouts it at him."

Tim looked up at Hi, in surprise.

"Is that so? Honestly?"

"That 's what I have heard with my own ears, as well as from others. It 's funny you have n't experienced it."

"Yes." Tim responded mechanically.

"You do n't mean to tell me that you never had occasion to pass his place?"

"Not without going in." Tim answered.

"Oh, I see. No wonder!" Hi exclaimed.

"Mrs. Wobbles told me he was the dearest old soul she ever knew."

Hi began to laugh. Suddenly he stopped, and, with a twinkle in his eye, answered, "She only knows lunatics."

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Then, while Tim looked at him, with a sad, drooping expression, as if he had gotten into a habit of mopping his face, and would burst into tears, Hi turned away, and started across the roadway, toward Farquhar's lane.

"Where you bound for?" Tim shouted.

"Down to see young Mason's trees." was answered, in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Young Mason's trees? On such a hot day?" Tim asked. "You must be crazy." he added.

"Not as crazy as Gruber's neice."

The sally of the lawyer brought no reply from his reticent friend.

"A little backgammon and some cool drinks, to-night?" Hi called.

"Bobby! Yes!" came Tim's answer.





CHAPTER VI

PHOEBE LAUGHS

A THIN column of smoke came from the big fool's-cap top of the hop kiln, and in the air there was a strong odor of sulphur. After an early breakfast, Philip, the forester, accompanied his father through the romantic garden, and out to the roadway. There, before the field barn and the kiln adjoined, they parted; his father entering the smoky building, to direct the curing of the hops, and Philip, walking away from the sulphurous atmosphere, up toward the north.

He moved slowly, along the dusty road of the valley, having decided not to take the customary short-cut, past the Blue Sleigh, down the fields, and along the river bank; but, to go to the village by retracing the way, that Mildred had come over, on a former sunny day. The same course, the hop pickers took, in the early and late hours.

He came to the levelled hop field, and passed the worn turf, that showed where those fine dressed young men,

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and women, and old men, and women, and children, had gained entrance to the field. The boards, that had been ruthlessly torn down, for the convenience of the older, & less lithe, and infirm, had been replaced by new ones, that had not taken on the low tone of weather-stained wood. The sedative scene of the field was succeeded by the sulphuric odor, as the hops were being dried in the kiln.

He glanced at the wild flowers beside the road; but it was only a glance that he gave them. He did not seem to recognize them. Birds flitted by, but he did not turn his attention to them. His face bore an expression, that showed that his thoughts were far away from hop fields, and newly - mended fences, and wild flowers, and birds, and odoriferous hop drying.

Ever since his sister Kate had been with her surviving parent; ever since that day, on which his father had driven to Brookvale and brought her from her husband's little woodman's shanty, to preside, as lady of the house, over the Farm of the Blue Sleigh, Philip had begun to reflect on the greatest of all miracles. Hitherto, births had been bits of news that interested him, but did not touch him deeply. But, since his sister had become a mother; since, in the early morning, he had been awakened by his father; and had been told of the birth of Kate's baby; since he had come to realize, that he was an uncle, and his father, a grandfather, the miracle suddenly gained from him more

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and more attention and notice. In fact, the subject had, for a time, come to drive out all others; so that he neglected the things which, formerly, he always attended to with so much concentrated attention.

He had passed some distance to the north of the hop field, had left behind him the smoke and odor of the sulphur, when he turned the corner, going down the road, that lead into the valley, and the village. Here, on the north side, were a line of houses all of a similar character; in fact, built so much after the same pattern, that, immediately, they suggested a row of tenements.

By some sort of contrast association, with the subject in his mind, one, of the houses, drew to it the attention of the forester. It was a little more slovenly, and dilapidated, than the rest. Woodbine ran riotously over the stoop, and partly concealed the doors and windows; old boxes, and barrels, and piles of boards of various lengths, were strewn about the long, scraggy grass, near the doorway; shingles were wanting here and there, the chimney was falling to pieces, panes of glass were supplied by odd-colored wads of discarded clothing; and, the whole place lacked care and order, and needed repairing. At the first glance, one could see, that the place was lacking in male attention, and an old woman, wrinkled and grey, clothed raggedly, and uncouth in appearance, bent over a pan, peeling potatoes, only helped to emphasize the fact.

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Philip called to her, and she stopped her work, and looked up askance.

"How is Mr. Hill, to-day?"

"Ailing, the same." she responded.

"Has the doctor been up to see about the brook?"

"Yes. And he says my man's sickness is from Gruber's old brook."

Then she added a curse for Gruber.

"I hope to fix up that brook for Gruber. And then the doctor can take away Mr. Hill's malaria." Philip added, assuringly.

"We have n't any money." the old woman responded, returning to peeling her potatoes.

Philip resumed his thoughts about the baby, and hurrying, passed over the bridge of the valley river, and came along the gravelled walk, before the Golden Dog.

Phoebe was on the piazza, at the west end of the inn, and she looked up at the sound of footfalls on the path, stopped sweeping, and, as he came in front of her, leaned over the railing, and addressed him.

"Good morning, Mr. Philip. How 's the hop harvest? This morning when the wind was just right I could smell that awful sulphur."

Philip stopped.

"Oh, the harvest 's very good. But nothing unusual."

Then, thinking that he had been as courteous, as the

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occasion demanded, he started to go on to the corner store.

"What 's your hurry?" Phoebe asked.

"We have an arrival at home. I 'm going to the store."

Phoebe laughed, and sarcastically called to him.

"You an uncle? Uncle Philip?"

Philip had taken only a few steps, when she ceased her laughing, and her face flushed with anger.

"How are those foolish little trees down the river? I hope the old sulphur kills them." she shouted, maliciously.

Philip did not answer. Phoebe glanced up the roadway, and started, as she noticed someone dressed in black, coming from the corner store. Knowing that it was Mildred, she changed her voice to the sweetest tone she could command, and coquettishly called, "Come in, Mr. Philip, and we 'll drink a toast to the youngster."

Philip stopped, turned and looked toward her, as she, smiling, hung over the rail.

"You know I am not a drinking man. And I do n't intend to become one, now."

"But you might go to the pump and drink water. If you prefer it." she responded.

Then she laughed, again.

"As far as the sulphur is concerned, we would be glad to use something that costs less, and makes a more agreeable odor." Philip added.

During that moment, while he turned toward Phoebe,

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and answered her, Mildred had come far enough to see who were the two young people, in front of the inn; and, having seen them, she hurried across the roadway, and disappeared around the corner of a house, just as Philip resumed his way to the store.

The forester had not seen Mildred, but Phoebe had; and she laughed again; a laugh that seemed to do her heart good, not the kind that she had been forcing, but a genuine, self-satisfied, conqueror's laugh; one that had a vindictive ring to it, one that had in it, a suspicious tone, as if it were saying, "I beat you—I did—and I'm glad of it."

Philip thought she was laughing at him. But then, he was accustomed to have people laugh at him; especially for those little trees. Still he was almost angry that Phoebe, knowing that he was not a drinking man, that he had never been in the barroom of the Golden Dog—although his name could not boast such a good record,—that she, the ruling spirit, as it were, of the drinking set, had dared to ask him to drink with her over the bar of the inn. To him, it seemed that she had suddenly taken up a position of enmity toward him. She seemed to have turned her attention to his affairs, as if she had decided to either become a part of them, or else, to balk him at every turn in his fortune. He almost became impulsive, daring, bold. He was tempted to call back to her, and ask her, if she would not want to give a kiss with the wine, if she would

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not lend him some of her paint and powder to be used instead of the sulphur. Within his heart, he despised her, in fact he had to struggle to keep the hateful words from coming from his mouth. His hand trembled, and he half muttered to himself, "Ah, pretty Miss Phoebe, if you were only a man, I would fight you, for that." But Philip was a young man easily angered, and too yielding in forgiving and forgetting.

When he neared the store; when he had crossed the northward road, and had gone up the three steps to the piazza, before the store, he quite forgot Phoebe and his anger at her. Thoughts of the tavern, of the sulphur, of his trees, of the uncouth old woman with the malarial husband, were quite blotted out & obliterated by the more happy ones of the baby at home. So that, after he made his purchases, and closed the screen door, for some fanciful reason, he decided to hurry. He knew there was plenty of time, that Kate and the baby were sleeping, that he would have to wait until noon before he could see his nephew; still, from a pure matter of fancy, it seemed, he hurried.

Perhaps he reasoned that the neighborhood of the inn was no place for him. Perhaps the opposition, of his family, to the tavern, suddenly took possession of him. Perhaps he decided that he was most able to antagonize it. Perhaps he deceived himself, and thought he had been a

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long time, in coming to the store. Be that as it may, he hurried.

He walked through Farquhar's barn-yard, opened the gate into the field, and followed the path, worn smooth and distinct by the cows; the path that led down, through two large fields, to the river ford. Suddenly he stopped, and broke off a branch of the "succory to match the sky." He looked intently at the flower, and he breathed a hope that the little youngster's eyes would surpass, both the blossom and the sky.

Then, he dropped the flower on the path, and looked down toward the river. In the adjoining field, just about to put up the last bar to the fence, was Mildred.





CHAPTER VII

A FORE-NOON GAME

WHEN PHILIP was stopped by Phoebe, it happened that Tim and Hi were playing a game, or two, of their favorite pastime, as they sat at their table, in the barroom of the Dog. In truth, it was fore-noon; still, the two cronies were playing backgammon; and it was only by looking back to the beginning of the day as Tim saw it, that one could find the reason for such a variation in their custom.

Although he had had a restful night, a night of nothing unusual, the early morning found the bachelor restless and uneasy, as if he had not been in bed, at all. He had risen at his housekeeper's call, at a time, when he really wished to stay in bed, and sleep longer. Perhaps he got out on that "wrong" side; perhaps, when one considers the disagreeable life he led, in getting out on the "wrong" side, he was getting out on the "right"; on the contrary, it is probable that he did not get out on either side, but followed a teasing mosquito, over the foot-board. How-

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ever, he arose, and, in an uneasy state of mind, breakfasted, and having performed that feat with more success, than the slipper puzzle of the household Sphinx, he felt a great desire to busy himself about something. But what it was, his greatest mental effort seemed unable to discover. To-day, he was unusually passive, so that the tyrant and fate used him as a shuttle-cock. For a time, he sat silent and inactive, until she came up to him, and thrust his pipe in his hand, and Tim took the hint and smoked—outdoors.

Soon, three men came to work in the garden, and Tim directed them. But, he was merely carrying out orders, as could be guessed, had one seen him, going from the men to the kitchen door, for frequent consultations. When all were busy, and sure to be so, until noon, he paced up and down the side yard, as if he were a tiger in a menagerie. But he left behind him a little trail of smoke, went around the corner of the woodshed, and suddenly jumping up in the air, kicked himself. Then he paced the cage again—and kicked again.

He listened, and no noise came from the kitchen. The bang of a blind told him, that the tyrant was in his room, presumably, making up the bed. He turned away from the kitchen door, and felt of his pocket, to learn if his pipe was there, and finding it, as of course he could not help but do, for he had put it there just a minute ago, he called

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a "good by" for fear the tyrant might be listening, went out of the side yard, and, strolling down the lane to the main road, went toward the mills, and the village.

He came to the little building, just north of the carriage-shop, and looked up at the lawyer's sign—or, so-called, shingle. He stopped at the door, and, being beyond the deadly range of the tyrant, he bellowed for the lawyer to come down.

Hi stuck his head out of the window, and Tim laid bare the sorrows of his heart.

"Do n't you want to go up and play a little? I do n't seem to be able to find anything agreeable to do, and I'm lonesome, and everything seems to be wrong at home."

"Come up and do some law work with me. I'm studying a divorce case." Hi suggested.

"Oh, blow the law! If she was my wife, I might be very interested in your old divorce case. Can't you leave it for an hour?" Tim replied.

"But I'm right in the midst of a sentence of the brief."

"That means a half an hour. I wish you had a couch. I'd go to sleep."

"Well, I'll leave the brief. Wait a minute. I'll be down."

Hi disappeared from view, and Tim groaned and sat down on the doorstep. Presently, the lawyer joined him, and, having left, on the door, a note with the significant words, "Out, gone to the Dog", the two went to the inn.

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So, it happened that Tim and Hi were sitting quietly in the corner, near the open window, when Phoebe stopped Philip.

When the bachelor heard Philip's name, he jumped to his feet, and standing on tip-toe, looked out of the window.

Philip had not responded to Phoebe's offer of drinking a "toast", and Tim dropped into his chair.

"By the good saint Bobby, he must really be in love with Mildred or he could n't refuse pretty Phoebe's toast." Tim exclaimed.

"Do n't forget he is a Mason." Hi suggested, quietly.

"That 's so." Tim agreed. "His father is n't a drinking man either."

"Drink is n't in the Mason blood. And come to think of it, it is n't in the Wells' blood." Hi added.

Just then Phoebe's laugh,—that conqueror's laugh,—reached the lawyer's ears.

He dropped the dice cup, and lithe as a cat, bounded to the door. After looking out, he returned, with a disappointed expression on his face.

"Damn it! I missed him." he exclaimed.

"Missed him? Why?" Tim asked.

"Oh, never mind. I just wanted to speak to him."

Thereupon Tim looked down at the board and waited, expecting that his crony would resume the game. But, to his surprise, Hi did not; so that they sat and stared at

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each other. Tim became excited and decidedly curious.

"What 's the matter?" he asked.

"Did you hear that laugh?"

"What laugh?" Tim exclaimed.

"That laugh of Phoebe's, when she had offered to drink the "toast" to the baby."

"What about it?"

"That was a devil's laugh. If she had won Philip away from Mildred and broken Mildred's heart, she could n't have laughed better. I 'll be damned if I like that Phoebe."

" "All 's fair in love and war", they say". Tim added, not understanding how Hi could conclude so much from a laugh.

"That 's well enough where the game is n't decided." Hi answered, quickly, whereupon Tim jumped.

"Do you think he prefers one or the other?"

"Oh, Tim, do n't be a fool. He has never given Phoebe a favorable word. All the attention is on her side. Since that day of the painting of the Blue Sleigh I 'll bet there has n't been to him a thought of any other but Mildred. And Mildred's side I happen to know better. Gad, Tim, Phoebe showed she knew it by the way she acted at the hop yard, and here, that night she was carried up stairs, as you said. You do n't think she would take up with a man like Joel, if she had n't failed to get a string on Philip. And until the two come to an understanding this little flirt

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Phoebe will try and make Mildred believe she has won him, even if she has to pay for the drinks to make it seem so."

Hi developed the last clause, with all the emphasis of a loud voice, and poundings, of his fist, on the table. Tim seemed to be overwhelmed, and in amazement, he looked at Hi. Then, after a few plays at the game, he collected himself, a smile came over his face, and he spoke.

"You seem to favor Mildred Wells and young Mason."

"I 've good cause to." curtly replied Hi.

Tim was silent.

"You do n't think that I 'm going to let this Phoebe get the best of Wells' daughter, if I can help it, do you?"

"No. But why do n't you tell young Philip of it?"

Hi did not answer, he was like the parrot, he kept up a "devil of a thinking".

The game progressed, and Tim was so far ahead, that he had a good chance of winning; at least, it would have happened so, had he not gone off on a bachelor's reverie about Phoebe.

When Hi said that Philip did not care for the innkeeper's daughter, the soft-spotted old bachelor became merrier, than he had been, since the day, when she had turned her attention to Joel, and had neglected, and ignored him. He did not want her to "up and marry", and perhaps be taken away from the inn. For him, half the life of the old

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place would be gone, if she were not the one to answer his call for drink. He knew that she would stay there, as long as all her little flirting ways were not taken too seriously, and were equally divided among the frequentors of the tavern. And then too, there had been a new kind of a "slip 'twixt the cup and the lip", for, one day, when, in her coquettish way, Phoebe purposely slipped, silly Tim caught her round the waist, and kissed her. That, was the most serious piece of gallantry, that he ever had done for Phoebe; in fact, the most serious he ever had done for any woman. So, for many reasons, the heart of the confirmed old bachelor would beat slower, if the presence of the jolly little barmaid had been permanently taken away.

The lawyer's "devil of a thinking" was about Philip and Mildred. Accustomed as he had been, to receive the confidences of Mildred's father, he had not been very much impressed with the importance of the little admission, that she had made, when she asked him to go down the river, to see the young trees, and encourage Philip. The gossip of the village, and his companionship with Tim, had prepared him to expect that much, and the only wonder to him was, that she had not shown an unusual interest in the forester, before she did.

If Phoebe were not the kind of a girl, that he believed her to be, if Wells, when living, had not shown a lack of friendliness toward the Martin family, he probably would

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never have given the little affair a second thought. But **Hi** had a good deal of respect for, and pride in, the daughter of his late friend Wells; so that he could not help but feel more than an ordinary interest in, what seemed to be, her welfare. Then too, when he thought of that laugh of Phoebe's, there came to him an impulse to act. It was not so much the thought that occurred to **Hi**, after he heard it, as it was the laugh itself. Tim's words, "Tell young Philip of it", although they brought from him no answer, found a ready response in **Hi**'s mind. He suddenly felt as if there was an appeal to him for all his help; as if Wells, himself, had suddenly called out from his grave, for **Hi** to act as a father to Mildred; so that her success, & Phoebe's failure, presented themselves to him, somewhat the same, as a legal case, demanding solution.

He wondered what Philip had thought about his call on him. Of course he had talked a good deal about that salt scattering of Joel's, and he knew he would hear from Mildred, if Philip happened to guess why he really had gone down to see the trees. Every evening, on his way from the inn to his home, he expected her to stop him, and tell him of all the punishment he would have to suffer, in the life hereafter; all because he had failed to conceal, from Philip, the truth of his errand. But then, he almost wished that Philip had guessed it; so that the forester might be led to show the villagers, that he favored Mildred, and

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did not think anything of Phoebe Martin, the barmaid.

True it was that Philip had shown some favor toward Mildred; in fact, more than had ever been known to have been shown by the forester to any one. But Phoebe, in her free, frivolous, coquettish way, had made it appear, as if she had had the same attention from him, and, in doing so, the ambitious innkeeper's daughter had also had two things greatly in her favor, and more or less, in her hands. The first of these, was the custom, that, in the village, a tavern keeper's daughter was just as high, socially, as any other. The most glaring example of this, was the fact, that the village physician's daughter was a chum, and constant companion, of the hired girl. The second, and the most powerful for good, or evil, was the village gossip; and Mary Whipple's soul was as much the property of Phoebe, as if Mary had been a witch, and Phoebe, the devil.

However, Hi knew, that, if Philip should learn of the hopes and ambitions of Phoebe, he would very soon be able to combat these two enemies, and put them to flight, as if—to follow the previous simile—he had been a king of the fairies, dispersing the deceptive phantoms of the evil one. Still, “why should n’t I tell Philip about Phoebe?” continually ran through the mind of Hi. “Why not tell him and help the little love affair along? Why should n’t Philip have a friend in the inn, as well as out of it? What

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had Mason done to him, that he should not help Mason's boy—perhaps save him?" Then Hi's opinion of Philip, and his knowledge of the unfailing care of Mason, came back to him, & made all ideas of interfering, seem wrong. "Philip will stick to her if he wants to, and my word will not help it any. Then too, perhaps the forester already saw through Phoebe's plan. Young men of his semi-silent character do not indicate, by their talk, that they know as much as they do. A contemplative man always talks less, than others. Perhaps Mildred and Philip already had an understanding. At least it seemed best to wait a while and see."

Then a thought struck him; the very same thought that Mildred, in thinking of that scene of Philip and Phoebe before the inn, afterward neglected to consider in all the phases, that Hi found in it. If Philip had any weakness in his attitude toward Phoebe, if he was not really opposed to her, and her ideas, if he was a Mason only in name, and not in character, if he thought at all favorably of her, not to speak of caring enough for her, to join in a flirtation; if any one of these made "the Dog" more attractive than it always had been, or, at least, did not make it repulsive; it seemed as though it would be quite natural for him to return to the Farm of the Blue Sleigh, by going past the inn, back over the road by which he had come.

Hi stopped shaking the dice, put the cup on the table

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and, rising, turned toward the old bachelor, and spoke.

"I guess I 'll sit on the steps for a while, Tim. Perhaps we 'll finish the game later."

Tim looked up, in surprise. Never before, had a game been broken off, in that way. Hi slowly, and deliberately, went toward the door. Tim, thoroughly excited, and expecting something dramatic, followed; never suspecting his crony's simple motive.

With the broom in her hand, Phoebe came from the end of the piazza.

"Who won?" she asked.

"We have n't finished, my dear." Tim answered.

Hi was silent, and gave occasional glances, up the road toward the store. Phoebe poked Tim in the middle of the back with the broom handle, and, laughing, ran into the barroom. Hi looked toward the door, to see if she was out of hearing, and spoke.

"I would n't let that girl make a fool of me, if I were you, Tim."

Tim was laughing, and he suddenly stopped.

"Do you think she is?" he asked, seriously.

"I do." Hi answered.

At that moment, Philip came out of the store, hesitated on the stoop for an instant, and crossed the road, going toward Farquhar's yard. Hi gave a sigh of relief, then he arose, took Tim's arm, and they returned to the table.

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Tim was serious, trying to understand why Hi had sat on the steps so long. Phoebe made an unusual number of trips to the front piazza, and, after a time, disappointed settled in a seat beside the fireplace. Hi had a smile playing around his expressive mouth, and seemed to be wonderfully happy.





CHAPTER VIII

THE WHITE LIE

WHEN PHILIP looked toward the river, and saw Mildred putting up the bar to the fence, he placed his hands to his mouth, so as to make the call carry. "Leave it—down—for me!" he hallooed. Then he quickened his pace. He not only expected, that she would do as he asked, but it seemed to him quite natural, that she would stand there, and wait for him to join her. But, Mildred did not look toward him, or await his coming: she dropped the bar, turned her back, and walked toward the river.

It was evident that there was something wrong; that Mildred was not feeling quite right toward him; that she was not in a happy state of feeling, as Philip had been, now that he was thinking of the little boy, who had come into his home. For that reason, this unexpected, and to him, inexplicable, conduct, on the part of Mildred, hurt him, and clouded, as it were, the sunny sky that had hung over the forester's head, ever since he left behind him the

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Gruber brook, the tavern and Phoebe, and the village.

When he reached the opening in the fence, he replaced the bar with a bang, and ran, so as to overtake her. By that time she had neared the river, and had started along its banks, following the little foot-path.

"Mildred," he called to her.

She continued her walking, and only turned her head, and looked at him. Her face was flushed, a great deal like it was when she had come to the farm, and had helped to paint the Blue Sleigh; but, to Philip, it was evident that she was angered. Her eyes had none of their former deepness: it seemed as if they stood out, very firmly and coldly. There was no fascination about her hair. It was neatly done up; so spick-and-span new, as it were, that it would have tempted Philip, had she been in a different mood, to have slightly disarranged. But then, of course he would have done no such thing, for aside from the propriety of it, he knew what a fascination lurked in her hair.

"Oh!" she answered him.

"Mildred. What is the matter? Why do you greet me so cold and indifferent? I thought you had renewed our old acquaintance. At least it seemed as if you were glad to come down to the farm."

He came nearer, watching, with a faint hope that she would look him squarely in the eyes, and explain. He was half tempted to treat her as a child; to run up to her, and

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bury her in his arms; but, only a thought, drove that out of his mind. He did not feel any love toward her—at least he did not feel what he recognized as love. So, upon second thought, he made up his mind to act toward her, as she did toward him. He began to question her, trying to learn what was wrong—why she had suddenly become so reserved in her manner.

“Are you going down to the dairy?” he asked.

This time she did not deign to look at him. She was looking down the river, toward the city man’s home.

“Or, were you going somewhere else?” he added.

Mildred hesitated and thought. She had not expected him to ask her where she was going. What she did expect, she did not know, and she cared little. Now, that he had asked it, there did seem, to her, to be a question. It had not occurred to her that there could be one. She somehow neglected to think of it. But, here, he had asked her where she was going, just as if he cared. She thought he could not. She could not understand how he could expect her to explain her attitude toward him, when he had been so lover-like toward Phoebe.

“I ’m going down the river.” she finally said, coldly.

In the early morning, when the village doctor had returned from the Farm of the Blue Sleigh, he had stopped at the red house to inform Mildred of the birth of Kate’s baby. Some days previous, there had been an understand-

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ing between Kate and Mildred and Philip's father, that, when the baby came, Mildred would come to the farm to take up the dairy work. And this understanding had come about, mostly, because Mason, in his provident watchfulness over the welfare of his daughter, had offered Mildred such a position, and she had accepted it. But, now, she was disposed to neglect her promise. The sight that she had beheld; Philip looking back at Phoebe, as if he were sorry to leave her; Phoebe leaning coquettishly, lovingly, on the rail: had repelled her. She felt a hatred of him, and, in consequence, of his home and people; especially now, when he had just come from there. When there was so much to be done at home, she thought it little recommendation for him to be spending his time in the village. Then too, she had heard Phoebe's laugh, and she feared she might see them nearer one another, perhaps Philip holding Phoebe's hand, perhaps bold Phoebe kissing him, there in the broad daylight before the neighbors.

Then, there came to her a desire to run away from it all, and only to come back, when she had had time to recover from her surprise and disappointment. She wished to hurry down the fields, down near that pretty little home that Burleigh had built. She felt sure that Philip would not interfere with her there; surely, when she had repulsed him, he would go home by the same way as he had come. He would go back past the inn, and then, of course, the

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scene before the piazza would be repeated. And, oh how the gossips would talk!

She wanted to hurry away—far, far away—where she could not again hear that laugh, where there would be no chance of her seeing Philip and Phoebe, within arm's reach of one another. His help, when she had gone to see his father about hop picking, his encouragement to her, was, after all, only Mason chivalry. She had been foolishly fooled. What she thought attention to, and preference for, her, had only been the genial kindness inherited by all of the family. The gossip of Mary Whipple had only been gossip. Of course, it could be nothing more. And so, the question came to her, what could she do to get away from him? At first she was almost incited to put out her hands, and cry out, for him to go away, to leave her, not to come near enough for them to tread the same ground, or breathe the same air. Then, she thought she would accuse him of being a hypocrite; of pretending to be another example of a valley-reputationed family; a family known for the uprightness, and sincerity of its members. But, no, that would show that she cared, and she would not do that, now.

And so, with a veritable war of impulses and desires, of duties and promises, waging in her mind, until it seemed as if her head would split, as if she would go mad, she found her courage, and chose the easiest path out of the

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trouble. And the easiest way was to tell a white, venial lie. "I 'm going down the river." she said, coldly.

Philip was so completely surprised, that he stood and looked at her, and did not make a reply. But she did not look at him, and, when she did not say anything more, a veritably overwhelming flood rolled over the young forester, and for, what seemed, a long time, he was silent. That short, abrupt, determined, cold answer, made him think, for the first time since he had guessed why Hi had come to see his trees, that Mildred had come to join all the others, who were more or less conservatively opposed to any new ideas of forestry, that he tried to introduce into the Valley of Gardens. He forgot the baby and his happy hopes for it; he forgot the little success that he had already had. Back upon him, came the taunts of the villagers, the smiles of the men, as he passed by, the rumor of his failures, the "well I do n't knows" so common in the mouths of all, the taunt of Phoebe, the opposition by this man, the disagreeableness of Gruber, and the difficulties of the task, even if he succeeded in getting it, and then, finally, came this blow at the hands of Mildred, as if it was a fated matter, that all should oppose him in the efforts that he made.

If he could only go back a few days—yes, a month, a year, aye even ten years,—if he could only have started in some other place, if he could have gone in with that

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company, instead of selfishly trying to succeed by himself. But he could go back. It was not too late yet.

Then there swelled up in him a little hope. Surely he had been doing well, even better than he had expected, better than others in the same work. Surely he need not despair, when that was the case. But Mildred! What had suddenly come over her? Why did she treat him so coldly? Was it that she feared he was seriously courting her? Had too many of the village rumors reached her mother's ears? Had Mrs. Wells talked to her about him?

"Oh, I'm getting too sentimental," he exclaimed, to himself. She might be trying him, she might be throwing out a little opposition to make him declare himself all the more strongly, she might be sensitive; in truth, to-day was the day when she was to come to work in the dairy. Perhaps she was affected by it, perhaps she had become somewhat sullen, because she was going to work. Then, he decided to urge her a little more, and he spoke slowly.

"Would n't you like to have company, on your way to the farm? I would."

Mildred did not immediately answer. She hesitated, trying to formulate an answer; and Philip repeated his question. Her first impulse was to cry out that she did want company; that, in saying she was going down the river, she had not told the truth; that if he really wanted her to go with him,—and his voice seemed sincere,—she

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would go; that she would go anywhere with him, if he could really say he thought nothing of Phoebe.

But, her hesitation kept her from doing all, or any one of these. She hesitated, & again thought of Phoebe leaning on the rail; then, she remembered Phoebe and Philip at the hop picking, and her false answer followed, as naturally as the real answer should have.

"It would be too far to go both up to the farm, and down the river."

It became perfectly clear to Philip that she wished to get away from him, that for some reason she did not want to walk with him. Then he gave up all thought of trying to urge her, and merely plied his questions, in the hope of learning something of her motive—some reason for her evident dislike.

"But why not go to the farm, and not down the river?"

By this time, thoughts about Phoebe had come to have full possession of Mildred's mind. She was determined; she had made up her mind. Her ears were closed to all entreaty, to all appeals, to everything. He had lowered himself enough to become familiar with Phoebe; thereby he had lowered himself below her. But, despite her brave resolution and her pride, she trembled, and her voice faltered in answering him.

"I was going to see Josey."

"Oh." Philip answered, giving up all hope.

THE WHITE LIE

As she spoke, Mildred glanced at him, and he glanced at her. In that instant that their eyes met, Philip knew she had told him a lie, and Mildred knew, that he knew it.

By this time, they had neared the river ford, and Philip stopped, and waited for Mildred to continue on the path to Burleigh's. As she walked on, he sighed, then drew his lungs full, threw back his shoulders, & turned to the ford. "Good bye." he called back to her.

No answer came, and he looked back. Mildred was walking along with bowed head, and in that attitude, she passed out of his sight. Whereupon he pushed his way through a line of maples and willows, and hurried to the river, and forded it, without stopping to remove his shoes and stockings.

As he stepped on the pebbly bank, he suddenly stopped, and looked back across the river, toward the place, where he had left Mildred.

Was that a call? It seemed as if she had called him. He stood still, and listened, waiting for a repetition of it; then, not hearing anything, except the myriad voices of nature, he went on. But what seemed a call to him, made him change his mental attitude, and he thought to himself, "Poor Mildred, she probably feels timid about being seen with me; especially when the villagers talk so. Poor Mildred, the tears are held back, but they are there, just the same as they were at the painting of the Sleigh."

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He continued on his way, up the field, and along that grassy road, toward the highway.

His father happened to be sitting on the Sleigh. He was smoking a pipe.

"Did you see anything of Mildred? She was coming to the dairy, to-day. Perhaps the doctor forgot to tell her of the baby."

Philip's turn came, and the white lie came from him too.

"No." Then, not trusting himself to say more about her, he started toward the roadway.

"Can I see my nephew, now?" he asked.

"I guess so." Mason answered him. "The little fellow has been calling for you some time. At least Kate said he was. He 's a wonderful little fellow, too."

Philip hurried, and passed out of sight around the corner of the barn. Mason, still puffed away at his pipe.

"I guess he does n't care so very much for Wells' girl, after all." the old man said aloud.





CHAPTER IX

JOSEY THE SHEPHERD

MILDRED strolled along the river bank, having left Philip, standing at the approach to the river ford. She walked on, and, slightly turning her head, saw that she was not to be followed; so that a sense of relief came over her. At last she was free to wander as she willed, to get away from the village, the tavern and Phoebe, the Farm of the Blue Sleigh, and the forestry, and Philip.

As she bowed her head, looking toward the ground, now and then she stopped to closely examine some wild flower, which by its contrast with its setting, was noticeable to her. Now that she was away from Philip, she began to cast off some of that wounded pride, that she had felt all too bitterly when he was near her.

As she heard Philip push his way through the shrubs, and young willow trees, beside the river; as she heard him splash through the water, her curiosity prompted her to look up from the flowers, to see, if perchance, through the

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trees, she might obtain, just a glimpse of him. She had begun to wonder how he had taken her action. She wondered if he held his head up, or looked at the ground, as she could not help but do. But, she did not turn and look, and if she had, she would not have seen him, for, by this time he was far up the field.

Her sense of freedom was not fated to last long. Along with it, came the realization, that in gaining it, she had lost something. She would have felt supremely happy, had it not been for one thing. But, in her first veritable ecstasy, she did not stop to think of it, she just strolled idly along the path, and drank in all the joy and freedom, that the flowers, & birds, and trees, and clear, warm air, could give her. But, alas! they did not give much, for very long, and the further she walked away from the ford, the less they seemed to give.

Then it was, that there burst upon her a realization of the truth. She remembered it all; how Philip had asked her a question; how she had met his eyes, and had deliberately answered a lie. And she knew, that he knew, it was a lie.

At that instant, she counted the cost of her freedom, she knew the cost of those few minutes of joy, of those few minutes, in which she was glad to escape from the forester; and, with that knowledge, there came a hatred for what she had obtained, and a great desire to atone for it.

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Suddenly the walk seemed lonely, and she wished she had gone to the farm. By some inexplicable law, she also became aware of the great variety of wild flowers at her feet, and, as in a miracle, her eyes seemed to have opened to see more conspicuous color spots, than she had ever seen before.

But, alas! none of them gave her pleasure, and every one had written on it, a lie. Why had she never noticed those flowers before? Why did they, as it were, suddenly jump up before her, to taunt and mock her? Why did they seem to suddenly take the part of the forester? Then too, how many different ones there were! What names they must bear! Oh, if she only knew all about them! If they would only speak to her more kindly! If they would only suggest their names to her, and remove that lie, written over the faces of all of them. If they would only cease from calling to her, "Philip, Philip, a lie, a lie, a lie."

Suddenly there was a screech beside her, and she jumped. A kingfisher had darted by. Then, along with the attention to the bird, came the memory of a former day, of a cat-bird, and a kiss of Philip's, when he was a school-boy.

A sense of loneliness, of helplessness, came over her, & she again wished she had gone with Philip, or better, that he had come with her. Then, without premeditation, she realized that she had shouted Philip's name, as loud as

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she could. She listened. Then she trembled, fearing that he would hear the call, and return to her.

All was deathly still, not a snap of twig, or movement of river-bank stone or pebble, not a sound, save the plashing of the river, the drone of insects, and a faint chirp of the birds. Far off, the kingfisher screeched again, and to Mildred came back the old romance days.

But, with that cry—merely the cry of a man's name—she seemed to remove all the weight of falsehood from her. Somehow, she immediately became conscious that Philip had heard it; that he had forgiven her; that he knew her secret. Then it was, that the lie was taken from all the flowers, and, happier, she idled along, and drank in the natural beauties around her, thereby renewing her life, clearing up leaden skies, surmounting what appeared to be mountainous difficulty.

She advanced with slow, deliberate step. As she came nearer to the river-bank, she saw a group of forget-me-nots, and she wondered if Philip had ever seen them there. Then she remembered that, that was the willow-sheltered pool, where he often went swimming, and she could see the little circle of tramped-down grass, where he probably stood on the bank before taking the first plunge. She stopped and gathered a handful of the flowers, and when she had them in her hand, she acted as if she did not know what to do with them. Finally she arranged them in her

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hair, and went on, again idling along happy and innocent.

Further down, she came to the land of the city man's country home, and she crossed the little, rope-swung, suspension bridge. The "tread" of the bridge swung back and forth, and felt less and less safe, until she reached the centre of the river, where she grasped the ropes, with both hands, and stood still, waiting for the bridge to stop swaying.

From a window in the Burleigh home, someone, in a soft, feminine voice, called to her.

"Do you want any help?"

"Oh, no, thank you. It's all right now." And she walked on, and reached the other side of the river.

As she started to go back toward the village, up the western river-bank, she heard voices, and listened. She looked and looked, but saw no one approaching. Again the voices came, and this time she recognized them, although she could not distinguish what they said. Philip and his father were talking, up by the Blue Sleigh, and in the warm, quiet air, the sound travelled far.

She passed Philip's swimming - pool, walking up the western bank, and coming out on a cleared field, met the shepherd boy, at the big pollard willow.

Josey sat leaning against the tree, reading some sort of an illustrated paper. His shirt was unbuttoned at the neck, his stockings had fallen to the tops of his heavy boots, and

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his black hair was damp, and ruffled up, as if he were a half-civilized naiad, fresh from the water.

"What are you reading?" she greeted him.

He started, put the paper under him, gave a hurried glance at the sheep, and looked up at Mildred.

"Oh, that you? You scared me. It's Bob Brooks." and, with a guilty flush on his face, he held the paper up to her.

"No, thank you, Josey. I won't read."

"What you doing down here?" he spoke up, evidently glad to see she ignored the detective-story paper.

"I came for a walk." she answered him.

"But Mr. Philip just went up to the house." he replied, in an innocent tone.

Mildred flushed up a little. She thought "even this little shepherd boy links our names together. Just as if I couldn't take a walk without him."

"I wanted to be alone, Josey. You know we older people like to walk alone, sometimes."

She thought of the reason, why she was alone, and she had to swallow to go on.

"Oh, where did you get those flowers?" he asked, pointing at Mildred's head.

"Down on the other bank."

"How'd you get 'cross the river? You didn't swim, did you?"

"Oh, no. Of course I came over the suspension bridge."

JOSEY THE SHEPHERD

"Well, I'd rather swim over. Pa says it makes you feel drunk, when you go over that pretty thing of Burleigh's."

Mildred nodded her head. "It made me feel drunk," she added.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Miss Mildred. If you'll come down to the pool some day I'll learn you how to swim."

"You are very kind, Josey. But, I know how to swim." Mildred answered him. "But, tell me, Josey. Is it hard to tend sheep?"

The boy laughed at her.

"Hard?" he cried. "No! It's too easy. Pa says if I ever want to earn enough money to run a store I'll have to work harder than just set and watch sheep."

"Do you think you could teach me to tend sheep?" Mildred asked.

"Yes 'm."

"I mean, do you think I could ever learn to do it so as to please Mr. Mason?"

"Oh, yes 'm. I bet you could n't do anything that would n't please him."

"And would n't you care if he should let me take your place?"

"Oh, no! I'd be glad. It's slow work tending sheep. Pa says it's too lazy. But Mr. Mason wants me to, and I got to do what he tells me. Take my place, if you want it. I wish you would. It's awfully tiresome tending sheep."

PHILIP THE FORESTER

"But what would you do if I tended the sheep?"

"Do? Oh, I'd go back to work at the dairy. I can make more money there. Do you know, Miss Mildred, if I worked in the dairy six years I could have my store. Pa told me so. I'd have to work ten years, here. And let's see, that's—four years longer. My, four years is a long time."

"Bless your heart would you work six years for a store?"

"Yes 'm, you bet I would. I'd even work ten, here."

"You know Mr. Mason wants me to work in the dairy, do n't you?" Mildred asked.

"Oh, yes. I wish he'd asked me. But you wimmun folks can't do the work we men do. He'll have to have a man there, some day."

Mildred laughed.

"You can tend sheep better than you can work in the dairy." Josey continued. "Oh, do take the sheep."

Mildred stood looking in Josey's eyes, as if she were considering his appeal.

"Here there!" Josey shouted, siezing up his staff and running off. Mildred followed him.

The sheep seemed to have become suddenly huddled together; they were fighting their way into the willow bushes, beside the river; and it seemed; as if those in the rear would stampede the rest of the flock.

"Here! What's the matter?" Josey cried, rushing in the midst of them, and driving them hither and thither.

JOSEY THE SHEPHERD

"Here! Git out of that, you!" he screamed, hitting one.

"Why, what 's that?" Mildred asked, looking at some objects secreted in the bushes.

Josey turned the bags over and over, and finally looked up at her, and said, "It 's salt. They love salt."

"Salt?" she exclaimed, looking closely at the bags.

"Yes. Just salt." Josey replied. "See, the bags are all marked. If I had n't hit that fellow he 'd had a hole in the bag. And then I 'd got it from Mr. Mason."

Mildred became pale, and remained silent for a minute.

"Josey!" she finally said. "What do they use that for?"

"The asparagus beds. What did you suppose they had them for?" he answered.

"Oh! I did n't know they used salt for that."

Then, Josey turned his attention to the sheep, driving them before him, down the riverside, until he came again to the willow.

"But, Josey." Mildred addressed him, not having allayed her fear of Joel's trying to kill Philip's trees. "Do they have asparagus this time of the year?"

"No, indeed, Miss Mildred. But Mr. Philip is going to build a tool house down here, and they 'll keep the salt in that, when it is up."

"Oh, I see." Mildred responded, as she sat down at the foot of the tree, and breathed a sigh of relief.

Josey was just about to sit down, when he made a little

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movement, reaching for his hat; and Mildred looked at him. His gaze was directed up the fields, toward the big barn, beside which stood the Blue Sleigh. From the roadway, up there, Philip was coming down the field, toward the willow.

"Oh!" Mildred exclaimed, rising.

Josey looked at her, and then followed her gaze, as it was directed up the field.

"That's Mr. Philip," he shouted, gleefully. "He must be coming after you, Miss Mildred. Oh, do tell him, you'd rather tend sheep than work in the dairy."

Since she had been talking with Josey, Mildred had become happier, so that her frame of mind was more peaceful and her conscience clearer. As was quite natural, in such circumstances, the effect, on her, of Josey's talk, was quite different, from the effect on Philip, of the thoughts of the baby. In his case, the little baby boy absorbed his interest, and made him half forget Mildred. He gave up all thought of Mildred's helping him; so that he turned to his hopes for the baby. In her case, Josey brought back all that had been; all the help Philip had given her; all the confidence that she felt, when encouraged by him; all the respect for his character. And, along with that, came the first trace of her love. Instead of suspicion of him, there was confidence. She, somehow, felt sure that he could explain his action with Phoebe. She thought that, per-

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haps, it was only a matter of jealousy; that she had supposed, more than she had seen. She asked herself: "what did I see? Surely nothing." She began to plan just how she would approach him, and ask him all about it, just what words she would use, and she imagined just what he would say, and how he would say it. But, now, when she saw Philip coming toward her, she began to tremble. His walk, his firm, set mouth and frown, betrayed him, and suggested that he had a determined purpose, in taking such deliberate, almost machine-like steps. At first, she felt like running away from him; then, she thought she would hide; and then, that she would seek refuge in the city man's home. All her good resolutions forsook her, and left her, as it were, helpless. And too, even Josey seemed to suddenly turn into a torment for her.

"When are you going to get married, Miss Mildred?" he asked her. "When you 're married, you wo n't work in the dairy, will you?"

"Married, Josey?" she asked. "What 's ever made you think I was going to do that?"

"Why, pa says you 're reserved by Mr. Philip, and Mrs. Nickel says he 's just crazy over you, and aunt Lou says you stole him away from Miss Phoebe, and Mr.—"

"Hush, Josey!" Mildred interrupted him. "Do n't let Mr. Philip hear you say that."

She drew two hop tickets out of the waist of her dress.

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She had intended to redeem them at the Mason farm, but she would gladly spare two out of so many; especially if she could help to allay the tormenting boy. She thrust them into his hand, and walked a little apart from him.

"There's two hop tickets, Josey. Put them in your bank for the store. I'll see if Mr. Mason won't take you in the dairy and let me tend the sheep." she whispered.

Josey put them in his pocket, and looking toward Philip, whispered, "Thank you, Miss Mildred. By golly, I'd die for you, Miss Mildred."

So, they waited for Philip to come up to them; Mildred standing firm & determined, yet with a half startled look, while Josey smiled, and looked from one to the other, as if he had brought them together, and rejoiced at his jolly match-making.

"Mildred, will you come with me. I want to talk a little with you." Philip called.

Mildred said a "good bye, dear" to Josey, and followed after Philip.

The little shepherd boy began whistling, and, at every bar, or two, of his song, he glanced from one to the other of the young people, as they walked along the path beside the river.

"You'd make a great-looking couple." he cried.

Both of them turned and looked at the boy, and laughed; but his head was buried in the detective-story paper.

JOSEY THE SHEPHERD

"You got some forget-me-nots at my pool? Did n't you?" Philip addressed her.

"How did you know where I got them? Your pool is n't the only place it grows."

"Oh, yes it is. The only place in the valley."

Mildred took the flowers from her hair, and threw them away. Philip recovered them, and walked on in silence.

That started Mildred to picking flowers, while waiting for Philip to explain his errand, and he walked on and on for some minutes, talking of the flowers she picked, and occasionally making little side trips, to the trees, for fungus, which he likewise explained to her.

"Why did you go down river?" he asked, suddenly.

"I wanted to."

He looked at her, trying to meet her eyes, but she was looking down, at the path.

"There's another flower," she cried. "What is it?"

"Heal-all," he spoke up, and they continued walking.

"Mildred," he said, emphatically. "Sit down here, I want to have a good talk with you."

He pointed to one of the trunks, thrown, by the spring floods, high and dry, on the bank. Mildred mechanically sat down on the smooth end, and Philip sat beside her,—too near, she thought.

"Tell me the truth, Mildred. Why did n't you go to the farm with me. Father expected you. He said you sent

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word that you would come to work in the dairy to-day."

She trembled and looked away. He moved nearer.

"Tell me, Mildred—dear—please."

"I had a good reason to think you did n't want me."

"Did n't want you?" Philip exclaimed. Whereupon she knew that he did.

"Yes." she answered mechanically.

"Why?"

"I thought you had shown a great deal of attention to Phoebe. And I did n't want to interfere."

"Oh, fool that I was. I might have guessed it. You saw me, with Phoebe, before the inn?"

Mildred nodded.

"You thought I was making love to her?"

Another nod.

"You—"

"Mr. Philip, Mr. Philip." came the cry of Josey, as, hat in hand, and all excitement, he came running up to them.

"Oh, Mr. Philip!" he cried. "A fox came sneaking along the willows for one of the sheep, and I chased him and found his hole. How much money would I get if I killed him? Pa says there 's a bounty on their tails."

Philip and Mildred laughed.

"Five dollars." Philip answered him.

Mildred leaned close to Philip, and whispered in his ear.

"I will go up to Kate alone. Go help Josey get the fox."

JOSEY THE SHEPHERD

Philip had kissed her, before she could turn away, and Josey cried out joyfully, "I'm glad, Mr. Philip. She's nice. Gosh, I wish I was taller."

"Come on, rascal, and we'll get that fox," said Philip.

Mildred stood watching the forester and the shepherd boy, as they hurried along the line of trees. Then, she took up Josey's staff, and turned toward the Farm of the Blue Sleigh, driving the sheep before her.

A few times, she glanced back at the fox hunters, and waved her hand to Philip in answer to his signal. Very soon, she left the sheep, passed around the corner of the barn, and up the hedge-lined road; but, when she came to the sleigh, she stopped, and ran back to the corner. She looked & looked, searching the river-bank trees and fields, but she saw no one. Then, she turned, to go to the white house—and felt of her cheek.





CHAPTER X

THE QUEEN OF THE BARROOM

TIM HAD unusually bad luck, and soon Hi won the game, which by agreement was to be the last of that evening. The backgammon board was closed and put up on the window-ledge. Then, because the village news-factory, the gossip's circle, that met weekly, under the title of a "literary club", had managed to turn out little news of consequence, Tim was almost lost for a subject.

"I guess I'll have another ale." Hi announced, whereupon he pounded on the table, to summon Phoebe.

She had been sitting on one of the high-back seats, beside the hearth, and, noticing that Tim was watching her, she gave occasional glances toward their corner table.

Once, while Hi was waiting for Tim to play, and happened to glance toward the back of the room; Phoebe saw him, and gave a nervous jump, and a quick glance, that searched the whole room; as if she had seen someone, whom she feared the sharp, old lawyer might have seen.

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Later, when she brought the glasses of ale, and received the money from Tim, Hi glanced up quickly at her, then took up his glass and drank. In the act of transferring the coins from his hand to her's, Tim felt her hand tremble. He wondered what was the matter with his "dear".

Phoebe went out of the room, to the kitchen, and Hi looked up, and spoke, when he heard the door shut.

"Nervous, to-night."

"Yes, she 's quite fidgety." Tim answered.

"That man Joel is leading her a pretty fast pace."

"Yes. I 'm afraid he is." Tim responded.

Hi finished drinking his ale, and reaching for his hat, arose. Tim sat still and did not offer to follow.

"Are you going?" Hi asked.

"No. I guess I 'll stay for a while longer. I may get a chance for a word or two with the girl. You 'll be in the office?"

"I 'll be there until after mail-time. To-night, that old hunchback is going to come here." Hi replied, laughing.

"Good. I have half a mind to stay and see him, myself. You see I have n't seen him at work. Just at practise. He must have improved since then."

"Gad, I hope so. If I got caught, there might be trouble. Perhaps Martin would resent it."

"Oh, do be careful, Hi. You know what a fist he has."

"Yes, I do. But I would n't get in a fight with Martin."

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"Perhaps I had better be here, too." Tim suggested.

The lawyer laughed. "I guess it would be easier for the old hunchback, if you were n't here." And Hi walked toward the door.

"I wo n't be here, then. Good bye, and good luck."

"Good bye." And the door slammed.

Tim sat and waited for Phoebe to return. He thought of pounding on the table to call her, but as he had heard familiar footfalls overhead, he feared that Martin, instead of his pretty daughter, might come, to answer the call. Just now, the old bachelor had no wish to see Martin, in fact, even his presence in the room, would have been unfavorable.

The kitchen door quietly opened, and Phoebe, with a small bundle under her arm, came cautiously in. As she saw Tim, she started; but continued toward the hall door, and, no doubt, would have left him without a word, had he not stopped her.

"Phoebe." he called.

She pretended not to have heard him, and neared the hall door.

"Phoebe!" Tim shouted; loud enough for her, had she been up-stairs.

She stopped, turned about, and came to him.

"What is it?" she asked excitedly, at the same time glancing about the room, and looking longingly at the door.

PHILIP THE FORESTER

Tim stared in her eyes, and hesitated. The hand, and arm, with which the bundle was secured, trembled again. He reached out, and firmly held the other hand.

"What 's the matter, Phoebe?" he asked, tenderly.

"Oh, nothing." she answered, half heartedly; trying to draw her hand away.

"What 's that bundle? Come, tell me, I know by the way you act, there is something wrong. What have you in that bundle?" Tim queried again, holding fast her hand.

Phoebe gave him a piercing look, and leaned toward him, as if she were about to kiss him. Then she gave another glance around the room.

"You swear, you wo n't tell." she whispered.

"I wo n't tell." Tim answered, releasing her hand.

"Swear it?" Phoebe insisted.

"Yes."

"Well." she hesitated, and Tim waited eagerly. "There 's nothing the matter, you old silly." she shouted at him. "You 're a sentimental old dotard." she called back, as she skipped out of the room. Then she laughed and laughed, half hysterically, half madly; and hurried up-stairs.

Tim jumped to his feet, his fat face grew red, his chin dropped, and reaching for his straw hat, he muttered an oath, and started for the door. Before slamming it, he looked back into the room, and added another oath, then he waddled along as fast as he could, up to the corner,

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along the road, and over the bridge, past Hi's office, to his home.

Phoebe, unmolested, reached her room, shut the door, and hid the package under the bed. "We won't starve," she muttered.

She looked in the cracked mirror, gave her hair a few touches, smoothed her skirt, and returned to the barroom.

As she hoped, Tim had gone, and she was alone. She poured out a small glass of absinthe, and drank it. Then she reached for a cloth, and wiped the bar, at the end of which she came to the bowl of crackers.

As she went about, preparing the room, she made many trips to the cracker bowl, so that after she had eaten a handful, the licorice taste was not quite so strong, and the absinthe quieted her nerves, and renewed her courage for the evening's work—a work that needed a stimulant for one's heart.

Soon, the tables filled up and the night's business began. The noisy monster of an inn, had had his refreshing nap, he had recuperated, and he arose from his quiet couch, and began his lusty bellowing.

Groups of farmers and villagers, having received their mail at the corner store, had sauntered thither, and were taking their ease at their inn. The "ease" consisted, for the most part, of whiskey and brandy, and an occasional Epicurean order for some palatable combination of all the

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variously-colored & variously-labelled bottles on the bar.

Martin presided, as the host; smiling and responding short, incomplete sayings, working like a beaver, too busy to elaborate, or clarify his conversation. He had no time to hospitably join each group, and add to their joviality; he was a busy man, kept constantly busy, behind the bar, for a good long hour; only finding time to casually note that Farquhar, and the Vorses, and Gumry, and others of the village notables, were present.

Two young women, sluttish & without charm, daughters of less self-respecting village people, were doing most of the serving, while Phoebe, the drawing attraction, the queen of the revel, was waiting in the wings, as it were, for her "cue".

A group was considered to be highly favored, if it was waited on by her. If they could have seen it, from her standpoint, perhaps they would not have thought it so. While to them, she appeared to be a picture of childish frivolity, she was, in reality, a cold-hearted planner; a woman well in control of her wiles, especially when she was heart-strengthened by absinthe—a woman who lavished kisses, where she knew she could make the heart beat more than normal.

Those, whom she did not lead on to flatter and pet her, and call her all sorts of pretty names, before all the assembled "ease takers", she kept constantly uneasy, by prac-

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tising on them, with her cleverness. She was fully paid, when she made the crowd look on one of its members, as the victim of all her jester's jokes and sallies. So, she flitted in and out of the room, as her fancy prompted her.

Coquette Phoebe! And how, think you, she came to be so? When a little girl, she was hardly ever seen in the barroom. Would that she had always remained, a little girl. But that, of course, could not be. Very soon, she picked up the slip-shod moral standards of the tavern, she escaped from her rough nursery, and her mother's apron-strings, and found the glare and glitter of the barroom glasses, the highly-polished red tables, the free and flattering men, more attractive than the homely, little room, with its dark, old-fashioned walnut furniture, its home-woven carpet, its cracked and water-soaked plaster walls, and, above all, her ogreish, reprimanding mother. No wonder she preferred to sit on a small beer-bottle box, at the back of the bar, and watch her jolly father pour out those mysterious-colored fluids, and mix, for the village toppers, those rainbow-tinted drinks.

Coquette Phoebe! Oh, how the attractions for stronger-willed people worked on your plastic, innocent childhood! Why is it that all the glare and glitter are snares of the devil? How much easier it would be for little Phoebe, if the churches, and the goody-goodies, had all the glare and glitter! Ah, but it is not supposed to be easy, little Phoebe!

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It is hard, horribly hard, coquette Phoebe. Such, is life.

It was not many years before Phoebe came to take a doing part in the inn life. When her hair went up, and her dresses went down; for some obscure reason, a sort of apathy and indifference came over her mother; so that the apron-strings began to untie. Soon after, the young girl learned to be proficient in an abused art, the beginnings of which her father, in his jollity, "winked at", and the patrons of the tavern encouraged.

Phoebe could dance! Not the harmless little ape-like steps to the time of a languishing waltz, but the more attractive dance of the professional performer. So, Phoebe became the attraction of the inn, and she willingly distorted and strained the limbs, intended for womanly beauty, as long as she could thereby obtain flattery for her temporary prettiness, and increase the number of orders, that the waitresses called over the bar. Demons, not men, went to the inn, every evening, to see the girl dance; and for payment for their evening's entertainment, they stayed longer, and drank more. But the sensitive impulses of a young girl, could not be held by her jolly father, when, all her childhood days, she had been tied to her mother's apron-strings. When those were untied, no strings held her.

One day, in August, the dancer of the Golden Dog was missing. Whereto had she gone? Had she been whisked

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away by the demon, for whom she labored; had she repented, and, in her act of repentance, been borne off to heaven by a chorus of angels? No, neither of these—and yet, perhaps, to her, something of both.

A circus had been through the country, and, after a long search, Phoebe's father found her among the ladies of the galloping horse, and the naptha-lighted ring, and the dandy-dressed whip-cracker. Prima-donna Phoebe! Ah, but that ended the dancing!

A long, feverish sickness brought her forth, in one way, a different girl; but she still had a hasty temper, a poor judgement, a jealous nature; she was a coquette, but not a dancer.

Coquette Phoebe! Now your reign begins! Your father pets you, laughs with you, and buys you pretty dresses. Your mother sits in her room shrouded in impenetrable apathy. And the barroom is full of men, waiting for you. Hurry Phoebe! Run up-stairs and change your costume, prepare yourself for the theatrical, move a lock of hair here, touch a little powder there, rub a little rouge on your cheeks, and don your bespangled dress. Come Phoebe, take your "cue", come on, bring forth your smiling, devilish eyes, your free, flirting frolics, your cunning capers; come Phoebe, don your coquette mantle, and step up, and seat yourself on the throne of the queen of the revel! No baby-wonder at colored liquids, no respites from your old

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mother's apron-strings, no glare and glitter, no naphthalighted circus tent, no—no—no; but a queen's command of the pulses and hearts of men, a charming face and figure,—Phoebe, the country coquette, the jolly barmaid, the village actress, the queen of the revels of a barroom.

The old lamps, with their mirror-like reflectors, cast a yellow glow over the people. A cloud of smoke, made the room look as if there were two ceilings; only the nether one rose and fell in waves, when someone moved about, and disturbed the sultry air. The walls sunk far away into indefinite boundaries, and their color, intensified by the lights, gave the room seemingly infinite dimensions.

A pile of logs snapped, and sent rushing up the large chimney, a flame that cast on the scene a light, brighter than that of the lamps.

Two young men from the grist mill, and one, an aged hunchbacked man, and the prodigal Joel, sat at the table usually occupied by the backgammon cronies, Tim and Hi. They had turned the backgammon board over, and the two, sitting in the old cronies seats, were making a poor attempt at the simpler game of checkers.

Four middle-aged men, all corpulent, all with suspiciously red noses, two grey-haired, one black, the other drab, sat at a table in front of the bar. The month's accumulation of weekly papers were on the table, before them, and served for ready reference. They all smoked

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briar pipes, three of them straight, one a drop pipe, ridiculed by the other three. Finance was the topic.

The drop pipe had a new theory on a question of national importance, and was figuratively, and literally, propounding it.

One of the straight pipes, had a party spirit, as it were, indelibly dyed in him, and seemed to be a man, who would have blamed the party in power, even if the angel Gabriel had been at the head of it, and at the next election, would, on party lines, have voted against the good, winged saint.

When they wanted information about the grist mills, they called on the miller, who sat beside the fire; when they asked about lumber, they addressed someone who had come from Brookvale; when they discussed farriery, they took John's opinion as authoritative; but, when the financial situation was their subject, anyone was considered capable of understanding it, and his opinion was not to be changed by rime or reason. To the disinterested outsider, it appeared perfectly evident, that the less wealth a man had, the more he talked about finance.

So they sat there, & haggled over the way things were run in banks and Wall street, and when they agreed on anything, no one listened long enough to hear the amicable conclusion that they stumbled upon; so that, if they courted the attention of an audience, they could only get it, by talking, as if a fight were threatening.

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To hear them talk, an outsider would think that they held, in their hands, the formation of opinion of the whole county. When election-day came round, one of them was proven by Farquhar not to be a legal voter because he paid no taxes, and the votes, of the other three, were cancelled by a man and two sons, who had never been in the inn but once, but regularly invested their savings in something less slippery than drink.

The other nine tables were occupied by miscellaneous groups, mixtures of the farmer, and the villager, all sorts of country bumpkins, hardy farmers, and "sporty" rustics.

The general interest of the room—if there is such a thing in a crowded inn,—was centred about two tables; the one, where the checker game was a way of working off superfluous energy; the other, in the most prominent position in the room; namely, between the bar and the fire-place.

The men sitting on the high-back seats, at the fire side, plainly, perhaps too plainly, heard the financial argument. Across the back of the room, where the three tables were in a row, the man, sitting with his back to the four pipe smokers, leaned back in his chair, and heard the gist of their arguments. The table, at the end of the bar, toward the front of the room, was in as good, or bad, a hearing position as the high-backed fire seats. The others, at the front, received the talk, passed along conveniently by two

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men, back to back, turning in their chairs, and whispering in each other's ear.

At the bar table, the debate was loud and heated. The arguments were being delivered, with the emphasis at the beginning of the sentence, by means of an oath or two. A table, in the back of the room, was convulsed with loud laughter. Wonderful to say, a few on the fire seats, sat contemplatively holding their long-whiskered chins, and blowing smoke up the chimney. The checker men had given up the game, and, from the next table, were receiving, as if by wire, the latest blows. All the room was a confusion of voices, and clinking glasses, and smoke, and lurid lights. The financiers were being "ripped up their backs", and all were interested.

The hall door opened, and the attention, of the room, was taken from the financial arguments, and centred on the person entering.

Phoebe came in. As she moved toward the old cronies table, the smoke rose, and fell, and eddied in circles about her head; the lamps with their reflectors suggested the lime lights of the theatre; and the noise, that arose, might have been taken for the applause, accorded to the leading actress; while her flushed and rouged face, her dancing, devilish eyes, with her absinthe-fortified heart to assist them, her artistic gracefulness, her bespangled, brown-trimmed, orange dress, all strongly contrasted with the

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faces, features and habiliments of the men in the room; so that she stood out from her environment, looked foreign to it, but was rendered conspicuous by it.

"Now for a dance." some unmindful bumpkin called to her. Whereupon, the young man was promptly pushed off his chair into the corner, and silenced.

She leaned over one of the young men at the cronies' table,—one of the men, who had fooled at the game of checkers. It was Joel.

Unlike Phoebe, he was in his element. The smoke, and the lurid lights, the close, unhealthy atmosphere, and the groggy drinks, the odor of steamed leather, and the fatal combination of bad cigars, and strong pipes, all seemed to be fitting attendants of Joel. In face, action, and clothing, he was a creature of them; so that he fitted in the scene; was a concomitant of it, and, in fact, was almost amalgamated with it.

It was expected that Phoebe would kiss him, but she only whispered in his ear. As she did so, a sudden movement among some in the room drew the attention from Phoebe and Joel to the front door.

A shout arose when all the assembled "ease takers" recognized the man who stood there. It seemed as if they, as one man, cheered, and extended a hand in welcome to the new comer.

The smoke was drawn by the draught, so that the air

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cleared; the lamps flared and flickered, as if they were trying to give more light; and the whole crowd were attentive and eager, and their ears prurient.

"What will you have to drink?" one asked.

"I am not here to drink." Philip answered.

"Of course not, you 've come to see Miss Phoebe." another shouted. Whereupon a laugh arose.

"I have come to perhaps save someone from trouble."

"Oh, hell! You 're not going to preach!"

"No, I 'm not going to preach."

"Good!"

"I have nothing to preach that you would willingly hear. But I thought this a good time to spread some information. Those little trees of mine—"

"To hell with your trees!" "Throw him out!" "Shut up!" different ones shouted. But Martin called from the bar, and hushed the crowd. "Come boys, hear what he has to say. Do n't forget his father was the town "bully". "

Either out of respect to Martin, or the family prestige, a silence ensued, and Philip continued.

"Those little trees have been inspected by the state inspectors, and are guarded at all times, because it has been learned that there is someone who thought to kill them by scattering salt." Philip stopped, and looked about the room. "I thank you for hearing me. I wo n't forget it."

As he finished speaking, and stepped out of the door,

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Joel raised his arm, and threw a glass across the room.

Instantaneously, the old hunchbacked man, beside him, seemed to straighten out, & his hand forcibly struck Joel's arm; so that the glass was misdirected, struck the wall, beside the door, and smashed to pieces, falling to the floor. At the same instant, the door slammed shut and a Babel arose.

"You did n't want to hit him. Martin would n't stand it." the hunchback shouted at Joel, as he looked to see who had hit his arm.

"No, I did n't." he growled, in a tone of disappointment.

Suddenly the smoke was parted, and dashed about in veritable whirlpools, & Phoebe appeared, standing where the fallen glass lay scattered on the floor. She was "in the limelight", she occupied the centre of the stage, as it were, and held up her hand. For an instant, she stood there, posed in the picturesque, and it seemed to everyone that she was just about to begin one of her old-time dances. Silence took the place of the riot that was rising, and many mouths were agape with astonishment. Then, without speaking a word, she made a little movement of her body, as if she would remind them of her gracefulness, and ran to the table near the window, cast a glance at the hunchback, leaned down, and again whispered to Joel. Whereupon he arose, laboriously, and lumbered along, after her, out to the hall. The heavy door slammed to, after them.

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"The little gall looks pale." one remarked, immediately.

"Oh, no. She 's just excited." the hunchback added.

"Who the hell cares enough about his trees to kill them?" one exclaimed. Then a stronger laugh arose, and many joined.

"She 's particular who she smiles on to-night." another grumbled, in disappointment.

"He 's a fine looking wretch for such a beauty." a third cynically added.

"I do n't see why she wo n't dance." came from a corner.

"Shut up, Haskins. Or, I 'll pound your head." a neighbor threatened.

And, so the talk went the rounds of the room, and after it had quieted a little, the financial arguments were renewed and became audible above the talk about Phoebe and the forester's trees.

The old hunchback arose, and started toward the door.

"Where ye going, Hood?" some one called to him.

"Ay. I have to go 'long home. It 's a long walk."

"A great hermit you are. What 's the hurry?"

"Me a hermit? Never. Too many devils come to a man, when he 's always alone." Whereupon he tottered out of the door.

An hour passed quickly. The men began to leave, and the orders diminishing, one of the sluttish girls, tired out with running back and forth, from the tables to the bar,

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went home. The other stronger girls cleared the tables.

Martin was easily filling the orders, and he had already begun to wash up the big shelf of glasses.

The "high financiers", as the villagers called them, had had an extra glass, to top off their talk, they swore eternal friendship, wished each other all the joys of life, and, like most financial talkers, having persuaded Martin to "chalk up", against them, the drinks they had had, they managed to get out of the house, after tipping over a few chairs, and ruffling up a man's hair, by leaning on him, as he sat at the table near the door.

Martin called the remaining waitress to him, and sent her to ask Mrs. Martin whether Phoebe had gone to her room. The girl soon came back, and said that his wife had heard Phoebe shut, and lock, her door, and she supposed she was asleep, by this time. Then, Martin went on, in his work.

The last of the customers, to leave the room, was Bill Comstock. He came up to the bar, and, reaching over, tapped Martin on the shoulder. The landlord turned from the shelf of glasses.

"Oh, it 's you, is it, Bill?" he remarked.

"I want to say good bye to you." Bill answered, sadly.

"What? You 're not going away?" Martin exclaimed, dropping the glass-towel on the bar, and staring at Bill.

"Yes. I 've got a chance to "clerk it" in Sylvester. And

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I need money. I think I had better take it while it offers."

"When do you go?"

"On the night train. Silas is going to drive up for me."

"Well, that's too bad." Then, after a hesitation, he added, "I had hoped you would stay around here, and some day take the Dog, when I die."

Bill laughed.

"Oh, do n't give me the opportunity to make a fool of myself again. And what's more, you'll not die soon."

"I do n't know. I have n't been quite up to snuff lately. I'm afraid it's drawing a little near my time."

"But, when you do, Phoebe can take the inn and run it."

Martin looked at Bill in surprise.

"Phoebe? How?"

"Why she will be married by then."

Martin leaned over, and Bill, taking the hint, put his head near that of the landlord. At that moment, the last waitress asked if she could go, and, at his affirmative, the girl followed a man, who evidently had come to accompany her home. Bill gave Martin a good, long shake of the hand, and the two went toward the door. The few lamps still burning were extinguished by the landlord, as he followed his one-time rival, and an invitation to come at any time was given, as a parting word. Then, as Bill's slight form vanished in the darkness, the successful old landlord looked up at the sky and muttered to himself, half-audibly.

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"It 's a dark night. A bad storm 'll probably work up."

He slammed the door and bolted it. He stepped on the broken glass on the floor, and as he was kicking it aside, and about to turn away, he stood almost breathless, and listened.

He thought he heard a cry for help, but all was quiet, save the swaying of the elms, and the uncanny creak of the signboard on the rusty rings. The cry was not repeated; so Martin surmised that it was a freak of fancy, and he rubbed his forehead, and sighed.

Suddenly, the log on the andirons, broke in half, and the two parts of it stood on end, smouldering.

Thump, thump, thump, thump! And Martin ascended the stairs, to his room.





CHAPTER XI

MILDRED THE SHEPHERDESS

IN A FORMER chapter, we had cause for looking at the little river of the Valley of Gardens, while it performed one of the grotesque feats, that rivers, of its kind and age, generally do. When it came face to face with the natural obstruction, before the home of the Wells', it made that characteristic little dodge, and worked its way for half a mile to the west, before setting out on its checkered career, down the valley.

If we judged of its character, entirely by that little freak, that it foolishly took, we could not be greatly mistaken; for, after it had resumed its way, it showed the same bad characteristics. Like the little child, that it suggested, its faults and virtues could be found indicated by any distinct act, that it performed.

There was no doubt, that this little river was a prodigal son, of some stronger parent; it was a wandering, wild one, a "rolling stone", even amid its aged surroundings.

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It was like a young monarch, with wise old counsellors about him. It twisted and turned, as if it had a pain in its side, and wobbled its unsteady way, down an avenue, of aspen, and willow, and maple trees; an avenue that seemed to have been laid out on principles that had little suggestion of engineering. It just went along gayly, evidently with no particular design about its going; unless the free, artless methods of nature are of such importance, in the world-scheme, that they too are matters of divinity.

Be that as it may, it was a young river, quite young, and, at times, so impetuous that it turned aside for some bank, or sand bar which, in its maturity, it would have worn away by persistence. But, just as the children do, it conducted itself childishly. It rolled over the pebbly bed, gurgling, throwing up little splashes, like little baby arms. Now, free & untrammelled, it ran a short, straight course, between the lines of pollard willows that skirted one bank, the grass dotted with the most golden of goldenrod; now, like an old man, taking a rest in an easy chair, it lolled away its time, in winding and doubling, to one side and another, among fuzzy-topped shrubs and bushes; now, to a melody joyful, as if played on the harps of the houris, it danced from stone to stone; then, as if it had been punished for its folly, it stopped, silent and pettish before a bank, leaving a pool; then, turning aside its course, to run in its childish freedom, rushed along the "chute", into another

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pool, and out into a little swampy meadow, where it collected again its scattered waters, and went down the valley, away from our Farm of the Blue Sleigh, our Valley of Gardens, and Philip the forester.

With the childish river we came to a pool, and left it so quickly, that we did not stay long enough to see anyone there.

The spot was an Arcadian one. The water's surface was as still as a looking-glass; the eye could not perceive any movement of it. The trees and shrubs crowded the banks on both sides, with the exception of a veritable proscenium arch, made by the drooping branches of an old pollarded willow; while a bank of softest green, served for a stage floor. The roots of the huge, old tree reached out over the water, and along the abrupt bank, and where they clung to the ground on the greensward, they formed eerie hollows that might serve for seats, and underneath cavernous openings for fairies' festivals. It was a place, where one might surprise a fairies' ring, or an Undine, sunning herself on the bank, or a poet publishing, to the winds, his poems, or a Pythia sorting out sibylline leaves. Perhaps, if one could creep up noiselessly, he might find Walton, tempting the silly fishes with the wiles of men. Perhaps he might see sights that would make the heart overbeat itself, or fix the eyes in wonder and insanity.

It might have been Josey fishing at the big pool, for the

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little boy was quite a fisherman; quite a devotee to the Waltonian wickedness. But, although it was his pole and line and "bob" cork; still one must not forget, that he had an ambition for a store, and, consequently, sought hard work in the dairy.

Perhaps it was Philip. Oh, no, Philip's forestry did not make it advisable for him to spend his time in that way. It was Mildred, the new shepherdess.

She sat there, under the willow, fishing, to pass away the heavy hours; while, down the field a little way, the sheep nibbled the green shoots, and playfully fought with one another, for tender young bits of feather grass.

A kingfisher went dodging along the river's course, &, as he flew, jerked out his rasping shriek. Perhaps he was swearing, in bird language, at the impish tricks of the little river. The grey clouds were banked overhead, and the heavens were undecided, as to what kind of weather they were going to give. Only the bright colors, among the late wild flowers, were conspicuous. The afternoon was dreary, melancholy, a possible time for fish, but sad to the soul of a solitary shepherdess.

The cork stood still, on the calm water; no fish pulled it under, for no Walton held the pole. Mildred pulled it up, and danced the hook over the surface, to roughen it, and she watched the ripples it spread. An occasional quick glance, toward the field, showed her the sheep safely feed-

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ing. Then, she carelessly hit the surface of the water, with the pole, and sang in a strong contralto, loud and clear.

“Come live with me, and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove
That valleys, groves, or hills, or field,
Or woods and steepy mountains yield.

Where we will sit upon the rocks,
And see the Shepherds feed our flocks
By shallow rivers, to whose falls
Melodious birds sing madrigals.

And I will make thee beds of roses
And then a thousand fragrant posies,
A cap of flowers, and a kirtle
Embroider'd all with leaves of myrtle.

A gown made of the finest wool,
Which from our pretty lambs we pull;
Slippers lin'd choicely for the cold,
With buckles of the purest gold.

A belt of straw, and ivy-buds,
With coral clasps and amber studs;
And if these pleasures may thee move
Come live with me, and be my love.”

She sighed, and glanced at the sheep. It was not easy, as Josey said, to sit and watch sheep. As she looked back

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at the pole and the rippled water, she thought she saw white water-lilies, floating down the bend of the river. She looked again, and more came down stream; whereupon she tried, with the pole and hook, to bring some of them to shore. But the flowers floated too far away, so that, all her attempts to swing the hook into one, were in vain. She knew that someone was throwing them into the water, and she looked up along the banks. Near the stony ford, the fuzzy-topped shrubs, and young willows parted, and Philip came to the river bank, and looked down at her.

She was fishing again, watching the cork bob on the water, and wishing all the time, that the forester could stop his work, and come earlier, than usual, and spend more than an hour with her.

"Fishing," he muttered, disappointedly, for he had expected to find her idle. Then he went back, out of sight, among the willows, and began whistling.

Mildred gave a sly glance up at the ford, and, not seeing Philip, she again splashed the water with the pole. The whistling stopped, and sounds of chopping came to her ears. She sighed again, glancing at the sheep.

"Oh, I wish he would n't work any more."

Almost instantaneously the chopping stopped. Whereupon, she glanced up quickly, as if she expected to confront a fairy, or some hobgoblin, who might stand before her, and say benignantly "you have your very wish."

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The kingfisher passed, going up stream, and shrieked again. The willows parted, and the young man, barefooted, with a shoe in each hand, climbed down the bank, looked after the complaining bird, and forded the stream.

The shepherdess hastily smoothed her skirt, and, holding the fish-pole first with one hand, and then with the other, she felt of her hair. Presently, Philip, stockings and shoes on, came toward her. She gave a little jump, that served her purpose; in that it appeared to Philip, as an indication that she was surprised; then she looked up at him. Neglecting the fishing, she dropped the end of the pole to the water surface.

"Did you receive my messages?" he greeted her, as he took three or four water-lilies from his pocket, and held them out to her.

"They scared the fish away." she answered, as she took the flowers and smelled them.

"That 's all I have left." said Philip. "And they are all crushed." he added.

"But they are so sweet." Mildred replied, drawing in a deep breath.

Philip looked toward the water.

"Whose pole is it?" he asked.

For an answer, Mildred drew up the pole. When he saw the cork painted red, he exclaimed.

"Oh, it 's Josey's, is it? I thought it was one of father's"

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Mildred dropped the pole again, nodded her head, and immediately forgot all about the fishing.

"I heard your song," he went on. "I liked it. I was reading it the other day in Walton. Do you keep the flocks by singing to them, like a siren, or do you want to make me envy you your task, as Elizabeth would?"

She raised her head and looked him in the face.

"Philip I do n't understand you, you use words that mean nothing to me. Where is Walton and what is a siren and who was the Elizabeth, of whom you speak?"

He was looking toward the western hill, where the big woods, back of the farm orchard, were outlined against the sky. The reds and oranges were coming among the clouds; they made streaks of sunset, along the hop poles, piled high in the field toward the north. The dismal, melancholy day was breaking away, and the heavens were favorable for clear, instead of stormy, weather; so that Philip felt unusually happy, now that Josey was working indoors in the dairy, and Mildred was the shepherdess.

The sound of bells, came from where the rough, narrow path led along the hillside, to the barn. Philip's father was driving the cows to the milking.

Philip sat down, beside the new shepherdess.

"Well I will tell you about them," he said.

Mildred made a little move of her body, a move that indicated to Philip, that she was interested, and listening.

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"Walton was a man who wrote a wonderful book about fishing."

"Oh." Mildred said, disappointedly. "I thought it was one of those wonderful enchanted islands—perhaps like the one you told me of, yesterday."

"No. Walton was just a simple country-loving Englishman, who retired from business, and fished for the remaining forty-odd years of his life."

"That 's tedious and uninteresting. What is a siren?"

"A siren is usually an attractive young lady, who—"

"Never mind about her. I do n't think I want to hear any more about a siren." the shepherdess interrupted.

"Well, then there 's Elizabeth. She was a homely, conceited, old, wise queen, who heard a shepherdess singing and wished she could change places with her."

"Oh. I guess I remember her. Did n't she come in that old brown history at school?"

"Yes." Philip answered.

Whereupon Mildred raised up, and reaching under her, brought forth an old brown book, on which she had been sitting. Philip looked at her in astonishment.

"Is n't it funny, I have had that old book hidden in the tree here some time now, and I 've never read in it but once. That was this afternoon."

At the same time, Philip thought he saw a flush steal over her sun-burned cheeks, but he was not given an op-

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portunity to question her; for she immediately continued.

"And Elizabeth had thirty thousand dresses?" Mildred asked, turning the pages of the book, as if she were searching for what she said.

"Oh, no! Not quite so bad as that."

"Twenty thousand, then." Mildred guessed again.

"No—only three thousand."

Mildred was silent and Philip waited.

"Is—Phoebe Martin a siren?" she asked, as she placed the book under her, and toyed with the fish pole.

Philip laughed and laughed.

"Phoebe a Siren? No, she 's more like a harpy." Then, he laughed more.

Mildred was perplexed, and she held her mouth firm, and scowled a little.

"I suppose "he" taught you those things." she went on, when Philip did not answer her question, and sat there, laughing.

"Please—Mildred—do n't. I do n't mean to make fun of you. Some day I 'll tell you all about sirens, and harpies, and all the other wonderful things I have learned at Mr. Burleigh's, and perhaps some day you will go up there, and—"

"No. I wo n't." she interrupted. "He just spoils you with all those city things. He keeps you at work in his old garden all the afternoon. I wish he would go back to his old

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bad city and leave you alone. I hate him, and I won't go."

Philip's laugh suddenly ceased, and he became serious.

"I suppose you came from his place before you chopped wood," she added.

"Yes. He sent me."

"He sent you? Mr. Burleigh?" Mildred exclaimed, this time giving a real start of surprise.

"Yes. He said he did not want to keep me too long. I guess he noticed I was beginning to hurry the work. He said he wished I would—"

Philip's courage failed him, and he stopped. He looked at her, and she looked at him. Then he thought of her old romantic song.

"You remember what you were singing?"

"Yes."

She was waiting, and she looked at him, and saw something in his eyes; and he looked at her, and saw something in her eyes. By some mysterious and obscure means, she understood.

There was not any siren, or harpy, Phoebe, after all. His whole heart was filled with love for her; and, now that she realized it, her love for him suddenly became all the stronger. But, oh, how she wished he would declare it! Philip hesitated, Mildred waited, and, unconsciously, she put her hand under her, as if she were going to bring out that old brown book again. She became nervous with

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expectation. The forester summoned up his courage, and was about to speak.

Suddenly, there was a splash in the pool. The slim pole slipped from her lap, and slid in the water. The fish was running down stream.

The two young people jumped to their feet, and looked down on the water. Philip turned, and ran along the path, beside the river. Mildred stood by the willow, and shouted to him, to "be quick".

He ran, crashing through the young willows, through high-growing wild flowers, to the rapid water below the "chute". He plunged in, the water ran into his shoes and wet his feet, but he secured the pole. The fish was still caught, and he allowed it to run into the swimming pool below, and began to "play" it.

A few minutes struggle, and the white belly turned up; whereupon Philip swung the trout into the air, and on the grass of the bank, beside him. Then he wound up the line, and returned to the big, pollard willow.

Mildred was not there, and he called, thinking she, to tease him, was in hiding. No answer, and he called again. Then, as he stood there silent, he chanced to look at the spot, where they had been sitting. The old brown history had been forgotten by Mildred. He walked slowly over toward it, sat down where he had formerly been sitting, dropped the pole and trout, and took up the old book. He

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turned the cover, and some childish hand-writing confronted him. It seemed to be familiar. Then he recognized it as his own. He read: "Hunt birds with me after school. Your lover forever. Philip." He shut the book, and put it in his side pocket. Then he siezed the pole, jumped to his feet, and called louder than ever for Mildred.

A long-drawn horn sounded, up at the farm, and he looked that way. Up the road, near the barn and the Blue Sleigh, a cloud of dust told him that she was driving the sheep to the cote. The flock resembled the only remaining cloud, floating overhead, as if it were reflected in still water. As Philip quickened his pace into a run, and was overtaking her, the blether of the sheep and the tinkling of the tiny bells, seemed to him, a music, sweeter than he had ever heard before.

When he reached the road, his father came past the sleigh, toward him. At the same time, Mildred was just going around the corner of the hillside barn.

"Mildred was late. She must have forgotten her work." the elderly man said, with a sly smile at Philip.

"Oh, no. We were fishing and caught this." Philip responded, holding the trout up to view.

"It is pretty late for her to go home for supper. She had better stay with us. Kate will cook your trout for you. I would like to see you and Mildred eat that trout together."

Philip did not answer—and he did not dare to look his

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father in the eyes. The older man, guessing that Mildred had caught more than the fish, smiled, and led the way toward the house. Philip followed.

Then, as they crossed the threshold, Mason gave his son a few kindly slaps on the shoulder. But, neither spoke.





CHAPTER XII

PHOEBE DISAPPEARS

THE CRONIES sat in their corner, in silence. Tim smoked his pipe. Hi held his chin and looked off in the distance. Each one waited for the other to suggest the game, and each one gave an occasional glance at the broad window, on the ledge of which they thought the board lay.

"Well, what do you think of Mason's boy, now, Tim?"

Tim struck a match, and applied it to his pipe.

"Why?" he asked.

"Have n't you heard the news?" Hi exclaimed, looking sharply at his crony, as if he suspected that he was trying to belittle Philip's success.

"What news? Has he owned up to loving Mildred? Or has he shifted to Phoebe?"

"Lord, no! Have n't you heard about the forestry?" Hi queried.

"Oh! Yes, I heard how he got the job to fix up Gruber's brook?" Tim spoke; as if he had made a discovery.

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"No—no! Not that. He 's won the prize, for those trees down the river." Hi answered, as proudly as if Philip had been his own boy.

"The devil he has." Tim exclaimed.

"Yeh." Hi spoke.

"He 's getting to be quite a fellow. Now, if he would only make up with Phoebe." Tim went on.

Hi gave his crony a look, that expressed more than he could have done, by word of mouth, in an hour. Tim stopped short, in his plans for Philip, and Hi did not give him an opportunity to continue.

"Now, I suppose some of our people will give that boy some credit for the way he set out those trees down at the city man's."

"Trees at the city man's? I did n't know about those."

Hi looked with pity on his crony.

"And you never heard about those trees?" he asked.

"'Pon my word. I swear it, by the good saint Bobby."

"For heaven's sake what on earth have you heard of?"

"Oh, various things. But, honest, Hi, I have n't heard about those trees. Come, tell me about them."

Hi thought he saw an indication of a tear, or two, in Tim's eyes, and he could not resist the appeal of the simple, old bachelor.

"Come, tell me about them." Tim urged the lawyer.

"It was like this. That there city man, what 's his name,

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Burleigh? Oh, yes. Well, he thought he would encourage young Philip. You know he bought his land of Philip's father. Well, he thought he would encourage the young fellow, and he gave him a job for setting out three hundred trees. You'd think that easy enough would n't you?"

Tim nodded.

"But, it was n't." Hi continued. "Those trees were to be all six inches in diameter and gosh only knows how high."

"He did n't set out six inch trees, did he?" Tim exclaimed.

"Wait a little. I'm coming to that. You see, Burleigh wanted six inch trees. Well, Lew Salter, and Sid Leary, and Bill Buxton were having a loafing day, and they all went down to Wilson's hollow to see the young fellow get the trees."

"Way down there!" Tim interrupted.

"Yes." Hi answered. Then Tim began to refill his pipe.

"Well," Hi continued. "Do you know, they acted just like damn fools. Sam Carrol said so. They asked Philip if he thought he was packin' eggs. Just because he put some old rags around the roots, to keep them from wearing on the wagon. And then they looked at one another, you know how crazy Sid looks when he screws up that ugly phiz of his, and they giggled, and poked each other, and got in the way, till the young fellow had to ask them not to interfere. At that, they all got mad, and said he must be keeping secrets about tree diggin', and started off.

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But just then, little Josey, you know what a bright little fellow he is, well, he up and told them that young Philip had won the state prize on his acre of trees."

"Did n't they know it, either?" Tim asked, with emphasis on the conjunction; to excuse himself for his ignorance.

"No, they did n't have any public spirit. Just like you." Hi answered.

Tim seemed to be on the point of crying.

"Young Philip had told Josey not to shout it all over, and you see the boy waited till they were going away. He wanted to take them around the whole acre, to let them look at the trees, in the hopes that they might give him a few pennies. Well, like idiots they made the boy take them around just the same as the inspector had gone, and they even looked for his footprints, to make sure the boy was doing it right."

Hi stopped, and lighted one of those omni-present stogies. "Well, I guess the young fellow can get along pretty well, now." he spoke, as he began to smoke.

"I heard about Gruber's brook." Tim spoke up, when it appeared as if Hi were going to change the subject; perhaps propose that they should start their game.

For, to say the truth, Tim was not now altogether enthusiastic about the game. His defeat, of the night before, was too recent, and it brought to mind a good many former defeats at the old game of checkers; so that he was

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beginning to believe that backgammon was not entirely a game of luck; at least if it was, he was surely under the ban of the gods.

Hi propelled a succession of rings of smoke from his mouth, and sat watching them break, and fade away.

"The health of the people up near Hills' would be much better if Gruber's brook flowed all summer instead of running dry and leaving all that mud and slime to dry out."

"You do n't say so. Who would have believed it?" Tim ejaculated.

"That 's what Dr. Morey told me." Hi responded.

"But what has that piece of woods got to do with Gruber's brook?"

"What piece of woods?" Hi asked.

"That one that Sam Carrol and Philip Mason are working at."

"Everything to do with it. Why, do you know, Philip says, that, if those woods were cut down, and the ground cleared, there would n't be any such thing as that brook."

Tim looked at Hi, in surprise. His mouth was open, and he was about to make his "by the good saint Bobby" exclamation, when the attention of the two old cronies was drawn from the subject under discussion, and turned to the situation at the inn.

Up-stairs, somewhere, a strong, stern, vigorous voice, probably that of one of the hostler's helpers, was heard

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calling for Miss Phoebe. But there was not an answer.

The backgammoners sat and listened, and, when the call had been again & again repeated in vain, they looked inquiringly at one another.

"Philip must have made some money on Burleigh's and Gruber's jobs. He will be able to get married now." Tim broke the silence.

"He is n't in a hurry, Tim." Hi quickly responded. Then the lawyer reached up for the backgammon board.

Just at that instant, some window, facing on the court, was thrown up, with a bang. A high-pitched, feminine voice made the walls resound with a quick succession of calls for Phoebe. Tim listened again; he began to wonder why Phoebe did not answer.

"Someone has taken the board away." Hi spoke up.

"My board! Gone?" Tim asked excitedly.

"It 's not up there." Hi answered.

Tim pounded vigorously on the table, until he had succeeded in making his hand sore. Martin came hurrying in, in sort of a shamble, his heavy boots making a great noise on the floor.

"Where is my board?" Tim asked.

The landlord's small, black eyes fairly bulged out, as if they were going to jump from their sockets.

"Sure it is n't round here, somewhere?"

"It 's gone. Not a trace of it here." said Hi.

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Old Martin shambled back to the wide-open, hall door. "Phoebe!" he shouted.

Up stairs, a door-latch clicked, and expecting to hear Phoebe's voice, a smile was gradually developing around Tim's mouth.

"She is n't about. Her door's locked. She probably walked to Mary's." came the answer, from the high-pitched, feminine voice, that had previously shouted into the court.

Tim's smile was suddenly aborted.

"Do you know where Felton's backgammon board is?" Martin asked.

"Oh. It's in the kitchen I guess. Frankie found it in the woodshed this morning." the woman, at the top of the stairs, answered.

Martin shambled across the room, & through the door, toward the back of the house; he seemed to be hurrying as much as his size and weight would allow. He moved in a manner very suggestive of a big barrel, being shoved and rolled. But then, with all his ponderous grotesqueness, there was a faint suggestion of the debility of old age.

"What the devil was the board doing in the woodshed? The cook does n't play. No one ever plays but you and I. And it's my board." Tim said to Hi.

"I'm afraid there's something wrong in the wind, partner." Hi answered, drolly. Then he added, "Joel—from Berlin—Phoebe gone—backgammon board found in the

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woodshed. Damn funny. In fact, unusually suspicious."

"Did you note anything alarming about Martin's eyes?" Tim asked, whispering.

"Do you mean that peculiar look that comes and goes, the kind that we noticed in Wells' eyes before he died."

Tim nodded his head. Then, in a low tone, he added, "It's a sure sign when it does n't go away, but just stays."

With Tim's reply, there came, to their ears, another sound. It was that familiar thump, thump, thump, thump. But it seemed to them that it had a little hesitation in it.

Presently, Martin, one big, kind smile, above a starched, white apron, came back with the board. The "men", inside of it, jingled like a baby's rattle, and added to Martin's noisy footfalls, the mystic accompaniment that bells add to a dancer's feet.

There was a peculiarity, in the fact, that the rattling, of those ivory "men", suggested to the cronies, that pretty Phoebe had gone back to her old tricks of dancing, and was now approaching their table; so that both looked up, with rather unusual expressions on their faces.

"Do you hear my bones rattle?" he asked, as he came to their table, and placed the board before them.

His "joke", as he thought it, drew no smile, or reply, from the cronies; whereupon his face instantly sobered, and he added, most humbly, "I'm sorry you were kept waiting so long, gentlemen. It wo n't occur again."

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"Oh, that 's all right." both immediately answered.

Martin stood still, and looked down at the board, as they began their game.

"Who is that fellow, called Joel, Martin?"

"I do n't know much about him. Except that he picked hops at Mason's. Phoebe said he was from Berlin, and she knew his mother when she was down there two years ago. Why did you want to know?"

"I did n't like his looks." Hi answered.

"He does n't beauty much." Martin added.

"Hello." Tim interrupted. "There 's a "man" missing. Hang it! Everything seems to be wrong here, to-night."

Martin looked at the board. Then, a smile spread over his face, and he exclaimed.

"I 've lost one of my ribs." And he laughed and laughed.

In Martin's exclamation, Tim and Hi failed to find anything to laugh at. They sat solemn as deacons, looking at him, as if he had severely wounded them.

"I 'll get you something to take its place, till we find it." Martin hastened to add.

He went back of the bar, and brought, to the table, a four-ounce scale-weight. Then he went to one of the back windows and leaning out called for Frankie. After mumbling a few words to the boy, he came back, but did not stay; for his wife's voice, calling him, rang out up-stairs.

"That Joel 's gone. Come up here." she called.

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"Well, I 'm glad that he left. It 's worth the money to get rid of him." said Martin, as he went out of the room.

Hi held the cup, and did not put the dice into it. The game was temporarily neglected.

"He 's skipped his board, eh?" he spoke, as he looked in Tim's eyes. "I 'll bet the girl went with him." he went on.

Tim gave a sudden jump, and his face flushed.

"By the good saint Bobby!" he muttered, in a whisper.

"What 's the matter?" Hi asked, looking at him, sharply.

Tim did not answer.

"She 's a bad one, I guess. And if anything puts Martin in his grave it will be her." Hi added.

From up-stairs, came the loud sobs, & cries, of a woman. A hurried, and yet faltering, step on the stairs followed, and Martin's head appeared in the door.

His face was as red as it could be, his eyes fairly flashed, and, with trembling hands, he expressively arranged his rolled-up sleeves.

Tim arose, and bounded like a rubber ball to the door. After a few hurried words, Martin went through the hall, toward the courtyard, where he could be heard calling to Roland to "hitch up, quick!" Tim, thoroughly excited, returned to the table. As usual, the old lawyer was calm and collected.

"She 's run away, has she?"

"Hope not." Tim answered, as he walked up and down.

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"But she 's gone, is n't she? And Martin too." Hi asked.

"They can 't find her. And her bed has n't been slept in, and her clothes are gone. She did n't go to Mary's."

Hi sat, and looked at the old bachelor, as he continued to pace the floor. Then, he pushed the dice cup, toward Tim's seat at the table.

"Will we go on? It 's your shake." he exclaimed.

"Oh, yes." Tim answered, as he seemed to realize that they had no more than begun the game.

Hi looked into Tim's eyes.

"Tim." he said, in a tone of appeal. "I would n't let that girl's affairs bother me, if I were you. Martin can handle them, well enough."

"By the good saint Bobby, I guess you 're right."

Then, after a little silence, during which the sobs and cries of the woman, up-stairs, continued; and Tim quieted down; Hi added, "Martin looked full of fight."

"Yes." Tim answered. "The Mrs. must have taken it pretty hard, and her crying has roused up Martin's blood."

"It wo n't do to rouse his blood too much." said old Hi, slowly and deliberately.

"If Joel came in the door, now, I rather imagine he would be taken out a dead man. And if Martin could n't do it alone, I believe I 'd help him."

"Do n't forget that look in Martin's eyes, Tim. If Joel came in, I would n't be a bit surprised if there were two

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dead, to take out. Leaving out the question of your help."

The game continued; but it became fitful and decidedly erratic. This time, it was, without doubt, decided purely on a basis of luck; for, neither of the players had his mind concentrated on it.

Lawyer Hi was weaving, about Joel, a web of circumstantial evidence. There had been a post-office robbery at Berlin. This man came from there. According to the lawyer's calculation, without doubt, he left Berlin shortly after that robbery was committed. He had acted suspiciously at Mason's; had had a scene with the lawyer; had planned to injure Philip's trees, and had probably thrown the backgammon board, out in the woodshed, just out of spite. Now, he had skipped his board, and run away with the landlord's daughter.

While Hi was turning over these thoughts, Tim was not idle.

"You remember that I stayed here after our game last night?" Tim asked.

"Yes." Hi responded.

"Well I was just thinking of something peculiar about the way Phoebe acted toward me."

"Hum." Hi grunted, evidently expecting to hear of some trivial neglect, by the coquettish Phoebe.

"You know I felt a little sensitive about it, at first. I suppose I ought have stopped in the office, on the way home,

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and told you then but somehow I did n't just feel like it."

"Yes. I 'm glad you did n't. I told my wife I was going to bed." Hi answered, laughing. "You remember that old hunchback had to work then."

"But you might have caught Phoebe and Joel, if I had."

"Gad, Tim! What are you talking about?" Hi exclaimed, leaning over toward his companion.

Tim's pulse quickened, and the blood colored up his face and neck. At the same time, he became as bashful as if he were a boy. Then he blurted out a full confession of the way in which Phoebe made fun of him, when she had gone through the room with the bundle of food under her arm. He told how angry she had made him, and how he had hurried home, and had purposely neglected the law office. He repeated, word for word, his conversation with Phoebe, and ended by leaning back in his chair, puffing rapidly, at his pipe, and exclaiming, "By the good saint Bobby, I 'm glad I 'm through."

Hi sat, calm and collected, listening; and when the soft-spotted old bachelor had ended his narrative, the lawyer's eyes were sharp and keen as if he were a ferret.

"Gad! It looks as though I was on the right track."

Suddenly, piercing cries, from the court, drew the attention of the cronies. Someone was shouting, "murderer, murderer, murderer!"

Hi and Tim jumped up, upset the table, scattering the

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ivory "men" and dice, in every direction, turned over the chairs, and ran to a back window.

Frankie, the ten year son of the inn hostler, was hanging a doll to the limb of a tree. He had abducted the unfortunate miss from the cradle, neglected by a neighbor's little girl; had had a brief trial, in a stall, in the barn; had convicted the culprit; and was executing the sentence, with all the glee of a barbarian.

The rubber, that held the head in place,—and made it possible for the china child to have its head turned,—was weakened from long use; so that the cord tied about its neck, had set the head all askew, and drawn the neck out of the body, as if the doll were strangled. Added to that, was the disarrangement, of the mechanical contrivance for making the eyes close in sweetest slumber, when the doll was tucked in its tiny crib. Because of that, the eyes were raised, so that only half of the pupil could be seen. A human being, with mental and physical agonies portrayed, in face and body, would not have made a more suitable subject for a lynching.

Hi dropped in a chair, and Tim leaned against the sash. "I thought they had found Phoebe." Tim gasped. "Gad! So did I." Hi answered.





CHAPTER XIII

SUNDAY AT THE SLEIGH

PHILIP sat on the Blue Sleigh, and watched the house wren, as it made trips to and from the nest. It was the same bird, that Mildred had noticed, on that day, when she helped Philip to paint the sleigh; a bird that was one of God's children, but not so simple as to lack a certain pride over a home in the corner, back of the small, side, barn-door.

It was a warm, sunny Sunday, and the soft cadence of the village church-bell, came rolling, on the waves of heat, down the placid valley.

The forester's attention was drawn from the mother-wren to the road, that passed at the foot of the mountain to the east. Down the field road from the sleigh, down over the fields, over the trees, that lined the river's crazy course, there was a sun-lit vista, at the end of which was the eastern valley road, with the mountain base in the background.

Three wagons were creeping toward the village, and

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had it not been for the severe contrast, to anything near, of the colors of their occupant's clothes, they would have passed, unnoticed, by the forester. But, he watched them, as they glided toward the village, as if they were toy affairs, cut out of wood, and drawn by a string, along a piece of stage scenery. The horses did not appear to be striving with their loads, and the wagons did not appear to be jolting over the rough road. The people in the wagons seemed to be childishly preparing themselves for church service by an advance activity, that could only be followed by inaction and seriousness.

Philip sat and watched the church-goers, until they had passed out of sight. They suggested, to him, thoughts of the disappearance of Phoebe, of the absence of Martin, and of the gossiping villagers. He was glad that he had stayed at home, glad that he was not going to church.

Last night, after he had escorted Mildred to her home, when he was coming back to the Farm of the Blue Sleigh, he met the crowd of villagers, who were gathered before the corner store, offering their services, offering suggestions, as to Phoebe's whereabouts, making up little curiosity-fired parties, that would, if need be, search all over the earth, in the expectation of easing their prurient ears with a scandal.

The forester had had a surfeit of news about Phoebe, he had heard too many gossiping rumors, of her connec-

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tion with Joel and himself. As he sat there, on the sleigh, he easily pictured to himself the uneasiness of the church congregation; the wise glances, that, perhaps, would be exchanged between two ignorant women; the sizzling of the whispers; and, when the minister had included, as of course he would include, in his final prayer, a request, that the valley should be made peaceful, and all its inhabitants gathered safe in the fold, and he had bestowed the benediction; then, the gossips, the itching-ears, the adventurous, would form little crowds, about the front lawn of the church; and, on every side, from the news-making, and news-dispersing villagers, would be heard the details, the possibilities, the impossibilities, and the probable, and improbable, results of the disappearance of Phoebe. As he sat, and pictured the scene to himself, there could not help but come a greater hatred of it, and a deeper happiness, because he was not to be a part of it.

He looked down toward the Burleigh home, and a flash of sunlight, reflected from some brightly-polished object, momentarily drew his attention to the partly-concealed, side porch. A row of shiny, kitchen pans had been put out for a sun-bath. Before his glance moved, from the city man's country home, over the landscape before him, he saw a woman, standing in the doorway, and a man and two boys, going from her, down the valley. A minute later, he heard a hearty laugh of more than one voice.

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Evidently, Burleigh and his sons were going for a nature-walk.

It was quiet; the traditional, Sunday hush hung over the Valley of Gardens. Man, for the most part, had stopped his labor and put aside his work, in reverent obedience to the Biblical command to make the day holy.

High, in the heavens, the sun raced along, in and out, among a few cottony clouds, as if the old man Helios had decided to desecrate the sabbath by a chariot race.

Over at the eastern boundary of the valley, old Mount Henry stood silent and awe-inspiring, and, at times, a part of the cliff cracked off, and rolled down, until it found a quiet place, in the apron-like talus slope.

The giant, buried under it, did not think it a further insult to the gods, for him, on Sunday, to heave his breast in sighing, or turn over, to find a more comfortable spot in his bed.

Down through the centre of the valley, the little river wound its way, in its eternal race to the sea. The gurgling, the plashing, the song of it, seemed all the louder, because of the stillness of man, & his buzzing machinery.

Up on the hillside, back of the house, the barn, and the sheep cotes, the cows stalked their way along the wiggly paths, and ruminated their contentment cuds, as if they entirely ignored the air of sanctity, that man had taken on for the day. The bell-cow shook its head, just as much

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as it wished, and the clattering bell rang just as merrily.

In the garden, new flowers had just opened; they had come on Sunday, but they made just as much of an ado about it, as if they had come on a day, when the noises, made by men, were their hustling competitors. A honey bee went from flower to flower, buzzing its grievances, a humming-bird fished in a turban-like trumpet-flower, & a colony, of red ants, were throwing up a breastworks, and towers, and minarets.

All nature, as was her wont, was going on, perfectly oblivious of the prayers and hymns and Sunday, go-to-meeting clothes, in that stuffy, little church, in the village.

While Philip listened to the church bell tolling, he sat idly on the sleigh. The mountain, the church-goers, the city man's home, the river, the fields, the birds, and the sleigh, made him contemplative. And his thoughts were not without a touch of religion.

He felt thankful for his life, for his hopes, for his ability to find so much of wonder and miracle, in all nature about him. He believed himself to be in the universal church of the Creator; for a once white ceiling, hung with old oily lamps, he had the broad, blue dome of heaven; for a hymn, he had the harmonious song of the birds; for the low vibrant notes of the organ, he had the grand swell of insect life, in the air; for a preacher and sermon, he had a little life story, acted out by a devilish squirrel, and a pair of

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robins robed in gowns of black and scarlet; for a benediction, he had the perfect little lyric sung by a wren.

The two robins were making a great attack on the devilish squirrel. The little fellow had been ordered to exile, but he evidently needed a more telling mode of punishment, for his hellish crime. In the early spring, he had stolen two sky-blue eggs from the robin's nest, and had thereby reduced the hoped-for happy family, from three to one. The mother and the father robin had not forgotten the crime, or the criminal, and to-day, was about to be a time of retribution.

The squirrel was running the gauntlet. The angry birds swooped, like hawks, at him, as he ran along the fences, and the hedge, and jumped here and there, among the branches of the trees, in his efforts to escape their bills. After numerous repetitions, of this second act of "the tragedy of the squirrel", the robins evidently decided that he had had enough for one day, and when he retreated to the nether regions of the hedge, they sang him a bit of advice, and flew away.

Philip was looking up toward the hillside, whither the robins had flown, when a noise made him turn, and behold Mildred, coming up the road from the field.

She was breathing quickly, her face was flushed and her hair was a good deal disarranged.

"What kept you away from church? Why have you

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been running? You look tired out." Philip greeted her.

"Oh, Philip. There 's—a man—at the village—to see you. He 's from—Brookvale."

Mildred was trying to catch her breath. The flush on her face faded away, and a pallor took its place.

"Sit down, here." Philip said, motioning to the sleigh.

She half dropped, and half sat down. Things began to blur before her eyes, she swayed a little, as if she were going to fall. Philip put his arm around her.

"I'm all right." she said, motioning him away. "Get me some water."

He ran around the corner of the barn. Mildred lay back on the sleigh, and the blurred images cleared up a little. Presently, Philip was again by her side, and she drank from the dipper, while he plunged his hand in the water, and bathed her forehead. The color came back to her face, she smiled and sat up, brushing back her wet hair.

"There. I 'm all right now. Is n't it silly? I felt so like a fool." she said. "But you need n't use the whole pail on my head." she added, laughing.

Whereupon Philip laughed too. He stooped down, and, in taking up the dipper, he held her hand and kissed it.

He retreated around the corner, by the public roadway, and returned, after he had left the pail and dipper inside the big barn-door.

"Why did you run?" he asked, as he sat beside her.

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"Well," and she smoothed her dress. "You see it was this way." More smoothing of the dress. Philip took her hand.

"Oh, no," she said, pulling her hand away. "No kisses, and I'll tell you why I ran." She hesitated, then continued.

"Just as I was ready to go to church, this man stopped at the house and asked if the road up the river was the way to Mason's. Of course I told him it was n't, and turned him round, and told him the right way to get here. Then I asked him who he wanted to see. And, he said 'the young forester.' Ugh, is n't that fine. 'The young forester—'."

"Never mind." Philip interrupted.

"Well,—he said 'the young forester'. Do you know, that's the first time I've heard anyone call you that? It's funny, but—"

"Yes." Philip interrupted again. "But you are n't telling me why you ran."

"I will if you will not interrupt me. I do believe you're making fun of me. And perhaps you think I came only because I wanted to."

"Oh, no, dear." Philip answered.

"Yes you are," she persisted.

"Honestly, I'm not." Philip asserted.

"Then why did n't you let me go on?"

"I could n't help it. I felt so very happy, because you and

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I— Because you and I—” He motioned toward the old sleigh. “You know,” he added. “Just because you and I are here together.”

Mildred nodded, and asked, “Do n’t you want to hear about the man? I thought you would.”

“Yes, indeed, I do. Let’s see, we came to the part where he wanted to see me.”

“Yes.” Mildred agreed. “He said he wanted you to come over and help them out of the trouble at Brookvale. It seems that everything is going wrong over there. The men wo n’t mind the boss because they say he does n’t know what he is doing. They want you to boss the work.”

“Is that all?” said Philip. “You might have saved yourself a long run. I thought they would have to have me. There’s a forestry problem there that is peculiar to our locality.”

“But, Philip, just as the man drove off, Sam Carrol came up, on his way to church. I told him about the man, and asked him about the trouble over in Brookvale. He said that they were just chopping down everything in sight and he hoped you would not do anything for them. Then he whispered that they could not pay and the company would probably lose a lot of money and give the job up.”

Philip became serious, and sat looking off somewhere into a vague distance.

“And I thought I would come down and tell you what

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Sam said. So that you would n't spend your time to no purpose."

"Yes. I'm glad you did. I'm ever so glad you came, but I'm afraid Sam does n't quite see it all as I do."

"But you are n't going to work for them, are you? You know you may not get any money. And Brookvale is so far away."

"I think I would, dear. If they are in trouble, and I can help them out of it, I'll go, and they can pay me any way or any day they like. It's ten miles over and back, but I would n't miss my afternoon call at the willow."

Suddenly, Mildred put her finger to her mouth, to enjoin silence. A wagon could be heard, not far off in the direction of the village. She ran to the end of the hedge, looked cautiously around the corner, and came back.

"He's coming. If he had n't stopped at the Dog he would have beaten me." she whispered.

Philip arose and walked toward the road.

"Philip." she called. "Remember that you wo n't miss the afternoon call at the willow."

Then she ran around the corner of the barn.





CHAPTER XIV

THE CLOSING OF "THE DOG"

THE GOLDEN DOG was closed. A peaceful quiet had spread, from the serene face of the inn, to the very heart of the institution. The interior court was deserted. The building, with its two wings, towered up silent and monumental, as high trees stand around a clearing in an old forest. In the kitchen, only a faint clatter of dishes prevailed. There was no hurry with the work, no loud orders, no one, except the servants, to be fed; they had all day, and probably more days, and possibly weeks, of vacation, as far as their conduct indicated. The shades, of the sleeping quarters, were down, and no chambermaid rushed through the creaky hall, making a great noise with her ringing keys, and her squeaky shoes. The big barn-door was closed, and Roland, the inn hostler, the father of little Frankie, stole quietly in the side door, when he went to feed the horses, and arrange their bedding. Noisy, mischievous Frankie had been sent up the valley road, to the

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home of his aunt, who lived in such a secluded place, that the noise and antics of the boy, did not disturb any one, except the one person who was so unlucky as to be the temporary guardian of a little imp. However, Frankie's aunt was deaf, and there was no doubt, but that she appreciated the fact that her affliction was also her greatest blessing.

When someone inquired for Martin, he received the reply, that the landlord was not at home, and did not leave word when he would be. One, of the servants, said that Martin had been last seen, on Saturday night, in a buck-board, going down the valley. Another reported, that he had had something suspicious with him. It lay across his knees; it was long and dark. One said it was a gun, another, that it was only an old walnut cane. Be that as it may, Martin was not at home, and everyone soon knew that he was out searching for Joel. A few actually said what might charitably be construed as prayers; they did pray that Joel would get away, whether Martin carried a gun, or a cane, or nothing, to aid his fist.

If there was any business to be done at the inn, perhaps Mrs. Martin could attend to it? No! She could not be seen, she had locked herself in her room, only opening her door when she recognized the familiar knock of her favorite, among the waitresses. She gave orders, that none should disturb her, until Martin came back.

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The shutters of the barroom were fastened tight. Yes, indeed, the Golden Dog had broken its record, and was closed.

At the front door, Tim pounded with the knocker, and receiving no answer, he and Hi were temporarily at a loss, for an occupation for their leisure time.

They had started out, with an eager desire, to make their old game a sort of Lethe, for all the comment, and bustle, about Phoebe. They had heard nothing but reports and gossip, concerning the missing girl. All the morning they had been busy, in instructing three parties, made up of those, who had met at the grist mill, with the purpose of going out, and searching the country for Phoebe. One party had planned to search along the river, another was to search the western road, and another the eastern; for, by a hasty division of a township map, which Hi brought from his office, all possible hiding places were provided for. To say the truth, Hi showed no little ingenuity, and Tim no little interest in the plans. Finally, it was arranged that the news of the finding of Phoebe would be spread to those still searching, by lighting a fire, and ringing the school-house bell, and it was the part of Tim and Hi to direct preparations for those signals.

After the last party had filled their pockets with sweet chocolate, as a substitute for food, and had gone on its errand, the two old cronies sat on the piazza of the corner

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store, and served as sort of an information bureau. It was not long before the novelty of the situation wore off, and they said they wished that they could get away from all the trouble and excitement.

But, strange to say, they decided to seek the inn, partly, because if there was any real news, they would not, by any chance, miss it; and, at headquarters, they would get it correct; and partly, because they knew that, if there was not any news, there would still be a welcome quiet in the old corner; while, out of respect to those deeply concerned, there would be none of the senseless speculation, that took its origin from a so-called "literary club" of the village.

Inasmuch as they had heard no report, of such a fact, it never occurred to them, that their tavern might not be open. They thought, that, of course, Mrs. Martin would run the business, even if Martin did not return from his search before the evening.

Consequently, when they sought admittance, they found the door locked, they used the knocker, and when no one answered the knocking, each of the cronies looked at the other, and it seemed to simultaneously burst upon them, that the inn was closed. Tim repeated the knocking, and Hi scratched his head, and looked thoughtful; while both, expectantly, held their breath. No answer came.

"Give them another." said Hi.

Tim struck the knocker violently, four or five times.

THE CLOSING OF "THE DOG"

"By the good saint Bobby! It 's like a tomb, here." Tim remarked, turning toward his companion.

"Let 's get away from it then." Hi answered.

They walked, slowly along the path, beside the road, back through the half-deserted village, past the corner store, where Gumry was taking in the remains of the box of sweet chocolate, and, instead of turning up the road toward Mildred's home, and the rattling bridge, and the lawyer's office, they continued toward the east, up to the corner, and down the road, toward the city man's home, the road that wound along that side of the valley.

"It 's a good thing she 's gone." Hi exclaimed, when they were a little away from the village. "I have n't any ill will toward her, but if it was n't for Martin, I 'd wish she 'd never come back."

Tim looked at Hi, and did not answer, whereupon Hi continued.

"If she was n't at the inn a good many would n't take more than one glass. Do you know, I have heard men say a dozen times that they would like to get another look at that girl, and then they bang on the table, and if she does n't answer it they swear like log drivers. Why it was only three days ago I heard one promise to drink ten drinks if she would dance for him. I thought that folly of her's was buried long ago."

"If she had the chance that others do, perhaps she would

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never have been just like she is." Tim artfully suggested.

"Perhaps." Hi agreed, rather doubtfully.

"Why, if she, instead of Mildred Wells, had somehow won that Mason fellow, Philip, she might have been better, and she surely would n't have ever have thought of running away with that Joel."

"Yeh. But the devil must be in her." And Hi lighted another of those favorite stogies. "Anyway it looks so. Martin will probably find her."

"She 's a wonderfully pretty girl, though." Tim added.

"Yes, pretty. But if you were n't an old bachelor with a homely housekeeper, you would be looking for something else besides prettiness."

"With a homely old wife, I suppose you know all about it." Tim retorted, and was silent.

Likewise, Hi became silent, and each of them held to his own opinion of Phoebe. They continued on their walk.

"It 's too bad for Martin." Hi ventured.

"Do n't suppose he will ever get over it. His daughter taking up with a man like Joel!" said Tim.

"Martin is a very good sort of man, runs a good house, goes to church, tries to do things according to law, and then it has to be all spoiled."

"It 's pretty hard." Tim added. "And more 's the pity because it will put him in his grave."

"I would n't be a bit surprised." Hi responded.

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From the knoll, to which they now came, one could see far down the valley. Near the river, a large group of small trees, too regular, in their lines, to have been set by nature, showed them the acre, that had won, for Philip, the two hundred dollar premium.

Tim had not been one of the many villagers, who, when they learned of Philip's success, went to see those trees. He had not been one of that crowd of old open-mouthed, wide-eyed rustics, who, in half superstitious reverence, had given their tardy approval of the "experiment for a prize". He had not even taken time, to go near enough to see them. He thought it was too far away, and, thinking they were of no consequence to him, he had ignored them.

As they stopped on the knoll, Hi looked down toward the prize acre, and called Tim's attention to it.

"Young Philip did pretty well with those trees."

"Oh! Are those the ones. I did n't know they were so near to the village. I guess he did do well. He won some money by them. Two hundred dollars, was n't it?" Tim asked.

"Yes and a little more than that." Hi added.

"Is that so? How much more? I heard it was just two hundred."

"No more money, Tim. But a little respect from the village people. Besides, he 's won no common reputation."

"Oh!" Then the old bachelor added, "I 'd rather have

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the money and leave all the respect to the other fellow."

"Say, Tim. Why do n't you let the boy fix up your piece of woods?"

"What do you think I want that finnickied with for?"

"To make it better according to the laws of forestry, of course." Hi answered.

"Laws of forestry. Bobby! It would take a lot of money, would n't it?" Tim asked, as if that settled the question.

"Probably not a cent." Hi answered.

"I would have to pay him for his time and experience, would n't I?" Tim asked, convincingly.

"Indirectly, yes. But really you would n't have to give him any money."

"Why not?" Tim asked, surprised.

"Because he would make it pay all the expenses and give you some money and leave you with a better piece of woods."

Tim's mouth was wide open. He stared at Hi.

"By the good saint Bobby, is that what he can do?"

"That 's one of the things he might do, if you would let him, Tim."

"But why do n't you let him try it on your woods?" Tim asked, craftily.

"He 's going to, as soon as he finishes the Gruber job."

"Really." Tim exclaimed. "And do you think it will make them better woods than they are now?"

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"Gad, you do n't think I 'm going to let him practise on my woods, do you?" Hi asked, sharply.

"I do n't suppose so."

"Well, I should say! Come on, let 's go down and see his trees." Hi continued.

"All right. And if he 's there, I might talk with him."

"Yes. Tell him about the woods and perhaps he might open your eyes a little. I guess he can." said Hi.

Suddenly, a man came over the knoll, from the field, on the side toward Philip's acre. The two old cronies had not seen him, as he came along the line of fence; they had been looking off toward the prize acre, and, in doing so, had looked, as it were, over the head of Sam Carrol.

"Hello, Hosmer." Sam greeted Hi.

Hi gave a jump, and Tim trembled.

"Hello, Felton." Sam addressed Tim.

The two cronies responded, as if they were mechanical dolls, set in motion by the same wire.

"Hello," came the answer, in which the gruff growl of Hi, and the effeminate wheeze of Tim, made anything but a harmony. And too, these three men, that met, made a discordant picture.

Here, was the tall, thin, lawyer, with crow's feet around his eyes, face drawn down to the pointed chin, like a funnel, the lines in his cheeks long, the eyes small and sharp; in all, a man gaunt and melancholy, and yet graceful, be-

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cause he had a truly wonderful feline suppleness of limb.

Here, was the medium-sized woodman, a healthy, rosy-cheeked, dancing-eyed athlete, a man with the muscles rounded to perfection, an embodiment of strength, ever and anon changing from the awkward to the graceful.

Here, was the short, stocky, red-faced, round-eyed, corpulent, bachelor, a man active for his weight, quick with his feet, but not quick on them, a man, who, if he accomplished in proportion to the effort expended, would have excelled either of his companions.

To say the truth, Sam, the woodman, seemed to be the medium of the extremes; in person, he was half way between the short, fat man, and the tall slim man; as if he could, by choice, resemble either one.

"How is business?" Hi spoke up, as Sam stopped, and rested his hands on the dangerously sharp-looking axe, that he had had over his shoulder.

"Good. Excellent." Sam responded. "Philip has given me the greater part of the Gruber work."

"I thought you worked over at Brookvale." Tim ventured to remank.

"I've given that up until Philip goes over to fix it. That's deforestation, they're doing, not forestry or lumbering business." Sam answered.

"Oh." grunted Tim. Then he looked at Hi, as if he would like to ask him what the young fellow meant.

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Sam swung his axe upon his shoulder, & started along the knoll, toward the village.

"You 're going to work for Philip all the time?" Hi asked.

"Yes, regular work. Just now we are planning to go in-to partnership. But it 's only a seedling yet."

Sam continued toward the village. Tim turned to Hi.

"What did he mean, by that talk about forestry?"

"What? Deforestation?" Hi asked.

"Yes. That. What is it, again?"

"Deforestation." Hi repeated.

"What does it mean?"

"It means, just chopping all the trees down, as you did last winter on that piece of yours."

The two old cronies had reached that part of the rude road, where it made a large semi-circular bend, near the foot of the mountain slope. The stillness of the place was awe-inspiring. The two men stopped, and looked about them in wonder. The sound of a cow-bell came up from the pasture, near the city man's home; the low sound, of a distant train whistle, came from far up the valley.

A hawk screeched, so loud and near, that Tim looked up. The bird gracefully circled about, three or four times, then the wings stopped flapping, and it came down, aslant, with a fell swoop, as it seized an insect.

Tim held his head back, as one does in looking up at a high building, and glanced, from the bird, toward the big

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overhanging cliff of the mountain. Something white, in the crotch of a tree, just below the hanging ledge, attracted his attention.

The object, which held the eyes of the old bachelor, indeed appeared to be a lifeless body, and it would not take much imagination, to make one believe, that a person had stood on the ledge, and had fallen, or jumped.

"What 's that?" Tim gasped.

Hi was roused from a delightful reverie, and looked at the place which Tim indicated. For some minutes they stood speechless, straining their aged eyes. Hi looked at Tim. Tim looked at Hi. In each other's eyes, they saw the thought, that occurred to them in common.

"Her arms hang down pretty far." Tim finally managed to whisper.

Then, his mouth and eyes remained open and immovable, and his brow wrinkled, in terror.

"I only see one arm." Hi responded.

"Can 't you see the other, just beside that big dark spot, there?" Tim added, pointing.

Hi looked and looked, and, for an instant, neither spoke.

"It 's funny the searchers passed along here and did not notice that." Hi broke the silence.

"Yes, and Martin went by here too." Tim added.

"But he went by at night." Hi interrupted.

"That 's so, I had forgotten all about that." said Tim.

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"Will you go up the mountain with me?" Hi asked, his voice trembling.

Tim, unable to speak, nodded.

Then, with those difficulties attendant to their age, or weight, they climbed the fence, and hurried, as much as they were able, across the field, toward the mountain.

"We 'll need a rope." Hi suggested.

"Guess we can get one in Flander's barn." Tim managed to reply, between the puffs, occasioned by his corpulence and excitement.





CHAPTER XV

“SUNDAY-CHILDREN”

FOR SOME unaccountable reason, Mildred, the shepherdess, again brought the sheep to cote, too late for her to return home for supper. At the big willow, the afternoon passed quickly; in fact, so quickly that Mildred began to agree with Josey, that it was easy to tend sheep; and too, she did not need a detective-story paper to wile away the sunny hours—Philip’s presence helped to do that.

When they came late to the white house, Mason suppressed a wise smile, and again insisted that the shepherdess should stay to supper. In truth, the elder man was glad she had been late, he preferred to have her stay; partly, because she helped Kate in taking care of the baby, and, partly, and perhaps more, because her staying gave him a chance to observe her, when with Philip, and to learn, even better than the participants, how the little love affair was progressing. For, Mason was provident, as all good fathers are, and he hoped for his boy’s happiness;

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while he himself was made happier, when he saw that the shepherdess, and the forester, were not a little suited to one another.

Of course he had heard the village gossip about them, many "friends" had kept him well informed, and, strange to relate, some of the villagers, who wanted to know the facts of the case, had asked almost everybody except old Mason. Paradoxical, as it may be,—and yet pardonable,—he was the only one who really knew.

There is little doubt, but that most lovers think their parents so absolutely ignorant, of the art of love making, that they will never be suspected of having even a trace of affection for one another. Perhaps that is one reason for the proverbial blindness of Cupid.

Be that as it may, in this case of Philip and Mildred, it must be remembered that Mason had a romantic courtship, about fifty-five years ago, and he did not think it far off; perchance, not much further than last summer, and was quite able to recognize the art, when he saw it.

He happened to know Mildred, as well as he knew his own boy, and when his suspicions began to be aroused, he became a silent observer of all the infallible signs, of their growing interest in one another. He did not hastily jump to the conclusion that they would marry; he did not have to debate the question with himself, as Hi had done; he decided to appear as blind, as love personified, or the

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traditional representation of eye-bound justice; and, he obtained a peculiar delight by not giving the gossips the satisfaction of suspecting, that he did know the truth, and favored an alliance.

When supper was over at the Mason farm, and it was growing dark, Philip and Mildred started across the field toward the village. Half way down the road, that lead from the old Blue Sleigh to the river, they stopped to look back, at the bright star, above the ridge of the western hill.

In turning again toward the river, Philip chanced to look up at Mount Henry, and saw two indefinite figures on the overhanging ledge.

"Someone is up on the mountain," he spoke, addressing Mildred, and causing her to look up.

"They seem to be trying to reach something in one of the trees," she answered. "It must be something of value to make them take such a risk."

"It's probably the Dudleys after that blanket they dropped off when they had their picnic," he added.

"I guess it is," Mildred replied. Then she added, "they have got it."

At that moment, Mildred continued with Philip, in their walk toward the river. As she came beside him, he spoke.

"Let's go down by our land for a while. It is early yet."

Mildred did not answer—she did not need to. She slipped her arm in his, and they turned, going more toward

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the south-east, than north-east to the little valley village.

When they came to the riverside path, they crossed the little suspension bridge before Burleigh's home; but, arm in arm, they found no difficulty with its swaying, and having stolen a glance back at the house, they began to talk about their hopes for the future.

Dreamers of the fields that they were, they then wandered along, until they reached their favorite land,—the land which they called the forest of Arden, in the Valley of Gardens. Of late, to this veritable Arcadia, they had come on many little journeys.

While searching for wild flowers, while studying the life histories of trees, while wrapt in semi-superstitious wonder, at the fulness of nature, Philip had made friends with the squirrels and chipmunks. One grey squirrel, he had for a favorite. Even when he was chopping, it would come, at his call, from the top of a high tree, and would sit on his shoulder. It would eat from his hand. The chipmunks would frolic about him, and even jump over him, as he lay dreamily looking at the clouds in the heavens. The birds would sing to him, as long as he tried to imitate their melody. Philip, indeed, had found an oracle, not only in the base or hollow of a tree, but in every branch and leaf. And he had often brought Mildred to the Arden, that he had found, so that she could share his discoveries.

Consequently, in this new Forest of Arden, they had

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oftentimes become pantheists, Arcadians, Sabæans. Here they had passed some of their happiest hours; with this land they had formed holy and happy associations, here they had become children of nature together, learning to love the woods, the fields, the skies, the waters, the birds, the flowers, and all growing things, and, at length, learning to love one another. Here was the wood, in which, as children, they had built many an airy castle.

In this land, above all others, they would wish to build their home, a place where they could step forth from home and hearth, and look about them, on all the transcendent wonders that they loved in the world; a place, wherefrom, they could look up the field to the Blue Sleigh and Philip's paternal acres; up the valley, toward the low-lying clouds, that hung like a smothering veil over the city; up to the mountain, towering above the little village, and seeming to stand there, silent and awful, expressive in its serene silence of eternity; and, down the valley to the thick, wooded lands and sylvan solitudes.

Here, was a land for a new life, such a life as a Dante only dreamed of, a life broadened, and strengthened, and purified by the delicate hand of a womanly woman, a life wherein intimate acquaintance, love, and friendship took the place of a hopeless idealization.

Here, they felt that Philip could carry on to success the beginnings of the art expressive of a lover of nature; here,

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they felt that they would, day by day, and year by year, learn more of nature, animate and inanimate; here, they knew that all the beauties of nature would be opened up to them; here, they saw the hand of God in the working of everything.

And so, dreamers of the fields that they were, they then wandered along until they reached that dream land, that Forest of Arden, in the valley, and they imagined that they were already man and wife, that their hoped-for home was built, that they were living the life, that, in reality, they only talked of. And the sense of ownership that Philip felt, and that Mildred took from him, the sense of ownership of the land, made even more potent their dream of a future day.

So they strolled, innocently happy of heart, and hopeful.

Even as they now walked, they hoped to go to a house near that of the city man's, a home on their fifty acres that Philip's father had said would be given to him as a parent's present, when his time came to be married; fifty acres that lay between the river and the highway, at the foot of the mountain to the east.

There, there was the poet's babbling brook; fields and marshy places, with their show of wild flowers, miniature forests, with their pines, and maples, and helnlocks, and oaks; and underwoods, with the little wild animals, and various families of fungi and species of shrubs.

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And so, dreamers of the fields that they were, they wandered along in that new-found Forest of Arden.

In the open field, near the roadway, they found one big, straight, symmetrical pine, watching even as a sentinel; but contrary to martial manners, whispering weirdly in the wind. Some day that tree might afford shade to another flock of sheep, and Mildred & Philip would go there, and she would sing her shepherdess' song, in memory of a former day.

Among the old pines of that veritable Forest of Arden, there was one giant oak, that reigned supreme in a clearing, and sent far out its gnarled and twisted branches; some, high up to blend with the surrounding pine foliage, and others, bending low to the ground, in sisterly embrace of younger trees.

Near that oak, the shepherdess and the forester came upon a rustic seat. First they gathered oak leaves, heaped since spring in windless corners, and having covered them with dry dead branches, broken from a near-by tree, Philip set them afire. Then they sat down to read one of those favorite nature books of Philip's. Their reading had not progressed far, when they happened upon an idea that caused Philip to drop the book, and look at Mildred.

"Why I was born on Sunday," he exclaimed.

"You were?" Mildred asked, in surprise.

"Yes," he reiterated. "Sunday by a few minutes."

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"And so was I." she added. "How strange. Then both of us can see fairies. Read it again." she said.

And he turned to the book, and read:

"It is said that those children, born on Sunday, have a gift of being able to see the fairies, from which, they are properly called "Sunday-children". "

Mildred drew closer to Philip, and looked about her, as if she were afraid.

"We are "Sunday-children", are n't we?" he said.

She nodded.

"And, if we are, what do you see over there?" Philip asked, pointing toward the clearing.

The smoke had risen, and filled the little secret amphitheatre. The pungency, of the burning leaves, had scented the grove, as if all the gardens of the valley had given their sweetest odors; the unburned smoke had drawn over the landscape a fummy veil, that helped to hide the actual objects before their eyes, and brought before their mind's eye a scene from the life of the early nature lovers, a fanciful drama, or masque, of the life of the forest. And so, the forester's play began, and two young "Sunday-children", side by side, were the only audience.



A chorus of twenty dryads, in single file, came from the woods, to render sacrifice to their hamadryad. The first

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four carried large wicker baskets; and, as they led the line, moving in graceful circles about the tree, they shook out, from their baskets, a shower of sweet-scented wild flowers, strewn for softness and sweetness to dainty feet. So, the line wound up and surrounded the tree.

In groups of four, some came forward, and hung grain garlands, as Joan of Arc did in the woods of Domremy, and others, hung ivory-carved inscriptions on the trunk, votive offerings of some grateful individual, blessed by the oak goddess.

Then, when the offerings had been made; when all the ground was carpeted with flowers; when the tree was richly decorated; the nymphs, whose semi-nude bodies appropriated a ruddy glow, by proximity to the flowers, joined hands and danced about, with the grace of movement peculiar to womanly women. At the same time, their festal hymn made all the grove resound, melodious.

Suddenly, at one side, a shout arose; a scream was borne on the perfumed air, and the dryads gathered in a little crowd, withdrawing from their positions about the tree. Instead of a terrorized pallor on the faces of the beautiful maidens, instead of a trembling from fear, and the vacillatory movement, of those in doubt what to do, a dark bark of a tree seemed to rise up their legs, and, from above, their hair grew thicker, taking on the semblance of trembling leaves; whereupon, a dense foliage hung down and

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totally obscured their pale faces and tense, rigid bodies.

This transformation had no sooner taken place, than, through the shrubs, and trees, of the undergrowth, came a man, tall and muscular, cruelty and determination portrayed in the low brow, sensuous lips and set jaw. In his hand, he carried an axe. Because of the metamorphosis, he did not see the dryads, and understand their anxiety. He neared the oak tree, and felt of the bark, unknowingly trampling the flowers and tearing off the garlands.

"I do not care whether or not this be a tree beloved of an oak goddess. I do not believe in goddesses of trees, and fairies, and fauns, and satyrs. Were it indeed a goddess, in all her witchery, its leafy crown should fall to the dust to make way for my road." he said.

He swung his axe, and drove the sharp blade, deep into the bark. A scream, unheard by the man, arose from the dryads, the leaves of the tree trembled, and blood followed the blade, as it was withdrawn. Unseen by the man, one lithe, and agile maid, broke from the crowd, and ran fleet as a deer through the woods.

Another stroke of the woodman's axe left a notch, cut deep in the bark, and as if by miracle, the blood stopped flowing and a voice seemed to come from the heart of the tree.

"I, a hamadryad, most pleasing to Ceres, am beneath this wood. I prophesy punishment to thee for thy deed.

“SUNDAY-CHILDREN”

Forbear, lest the solace of my every wound be at hand.”

The woodman hesitated, as if he had heard the words, then laughed aloud; while a cynical sneer spread over his face. As he swung for the third blow, the axe slipped, and flying from his hands, fell to the ground, where it became buried among the flowers. The man groaned, as if in pain; he staggered, his face was drawn and wrinkled in terror; and, he fell headlong. He writhed and twisted, shrieking, and crying out, louder & louder, to Ceres, for mercy; until he had rolled, over and over on the ground, tearing his body with his teeth, in vain endeavors to nourish it. Finally he became concealed in the underbrush, where he stiffened into a discolored corpse.

A shrill trumpet-call rang through the woods, the leafy covering faded away, leaving the beautiful faces and bodies of the nymphs, the sheltering bark sunk in the ground, and the dryads joyously ran forward again.

Some replaced the garlands and inscriptions, and others rearranged the strewn flowers. In turn, they neared the tree, and closely examined it, fearful of the death of the oak, and the hamadryad, their goddess. Each one pressed her lips to the wound, each one, with flowers, wiped away the blood, & then, the festal hymn was sung again, and their hands rejoined, in the dance.



From far off, wafted on the wind, came voices; human

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voices, calling and laughing loudly in the night. The fancies, of the dreamers of the fields, fled; the smoke of the fire drifted away, and melted into obscurity, in the rapidly approaching darkness; until, unfed, the fire, with a few spasmodic tongues of flame, struggled, and struggled, in vain, and finally died down to a bed of trembling coals.

Philip and Mildred arose from the rustic seat and turned back, going cautiously along the partly indefinite path on the river bank.

On the opposite side, two figures moved away in the dark, the voices indicating, that they were going toward the village.

"It is probably some of the villagers." Mildred spoke up. Then she added, "They may see us, here in the woodlands, alone. Philip, I am sorry I came. We ought to have gone right home. They might make more talk of us in the village, everyone might talk and gossip about us, Philip."

Thoughts of the village, and that gossiping "literary club", made Philip irritable, and impulsive.

"Are you ashamed?" he asked.

It was a thoughtless question, thoughtless, because of its broad meaning. He meant to say something like "we do n't care, do we?" and he meant it to be, more or less, in fun. But his thoughts influenced his voice, made him careless, and roused the fighting spirit in him.

Mildred was hurt. She drew her arm away from his,

"SUNDAY-CHILDREN"

and shrunk from him. When she noticed how dark it was, she helplessly dropped to the soft turf, & bowed her head.

"Oh, Philip," she cried.

"I'm sorry, dear," he plead. "I did not think. I meant it to be in fun. I—"

Unconsciously his hand went up to his forehead, and he half hung his head. Then, he gazed off toward that land of Arden.

Mildred jumped to her feet, and turned away, along the path. She wished she had not taken his words too literally. She felt her face burn. She wanted to go away from him, just for a minute, until she could calm herself, and, having forgotten his words, return to him as happy as ever. She felt she had wronged him.

Philip took a few steps, in the direction of his Ardenland. He seemed to be able to see the house that they had planned, & dreamed of building. There, where his father had once stood, and surveyed the land, that Philip preferred above all of the Blue Sleigh lands; there, on that level bank, near the little orchard, and the wild-flower garden. The rambling roses seemed to be in full bloom, all up the side of the porch. Just above them, at the window, a face was pressed against the pane, the sash was raised, and she leaned out. It was Mildred—his love—his wife.

He suddenly became determined, and drawing his lungs

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full, and holding firm his mouth, he cast off his reveries, and turned and looked back for her. He would go down on his knees before her, he was wrong, he was sorry.

He looked and looked, in vain, peering, here and there, in the darkness. He walked on a little further, but it seemed to grow still darker. Then he shouted her name, and stood still, and listened. An answer came from far off, back of him.

"I 'm going home."

He turned, and hurried in that direction.





CHAPTER XVI

THE MOUNTAINEERS

THE VALLEY of Gardens had natural walls of an opposite character. That, on the side to the west, was a long line of hills, that fell away, in perspective, down the valley; that on the eastern side, was broken and diversified, in such a manner, that it brought out many conspicuous elevations, properly called mountains.

The western hill had a gradual, winding ascent, and, back of it, in the direction of the Brookvale valley, there were many many soft, velvety hills, mile after mile, into, what seemed, a western infinity.

But, to the east, the mountains held their heads conspicuously aloft, and the villagers dignified them, with the names of their village heroes.

Among these, Mount Henry reared its head, high above the village, as if it were the guardian of the valley.

The ascent was gradual, from half way up a hill, lying north of it; the side toward the early sun, was a straight

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slope, with a few maples at the foot, and evergreens scattered in groups. The southern end slouched away down the valley, in the manner of the side of a basin. The side toward the Farm of the Blue Sleigh, and the village, was characteristically mountainous, & its sheer cliff, its hanging ledge, its evergreens, wedged in the crevices of large boulders, gave it a strong, stern, calm, awe-inspiring aspect, and made it worthy to bear the name of the village's mythological counterpart of Hercules.

The ascending road was difficult, steep and stony, and, because, in time of rains, the water rushed down, bounding from side to side; it always had big ditches and holes, scattered along its winding course. To drive up would be dangerous, would be risking an upset, or a horse's broken ankle. To walk up, would not be as comfortable, and easy a task, as climbing a great flight of unstable stairs.

After winding up around the northern side, the road ran along the eastern half of the flattened top, and stopped at a root-and-stump fence.

From the fence, a path rose to the group of evergreens, that crowned the top, then turned abruptly to the right, and crossed over to the fifty-foot slope, that slanted down to the hanging ledge.

At first glance, the hill to the west, seemed to be low; but when the eye travelled from it, down into the valley; the illusion, as it were, was immediately dispelled.

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From this mountain top, the distance across the valley, to the western hilltop, was about a mile, as the arrow flies. If it had been very much more, all the western hills might have appeared to have been part of the flat map, at our feet; but the proximity of the two walls, of the valley, in spite of the awful drop below, made one feel as if it were only a good jump, across to the other hilltop.

As the level of one's gaze sunk, from the top of the western hill; sunk through the immense, thick woods, half-way down its side, the eye beheld, what might be called, the habitation altitude. Up as far as that, the farms went; but higher, they did not go; for there were no fields there, and the land was not arable; there was not as good a water-supply, as below; and perhaps, as on Mount Washington, the houses would have to be chained down, for fear they might, in a winter's wind, take wings, and change their location, to the valley below.

Below the habitation altitude, there were hillside fields, where the cows fed, by walking single-file, along the little wiggly path, partly made by their hoofs, and partly, by the temporary brooklets that, after a heavy summer rain, follow the path, down to the barnyards.

Then, still lower down, there was another line of farms and fields, before one came to the western valley road, the highway for those going up to the baby city, twenty miles north, or down past the Farm of the Blue Sleigh,

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to the country junction, thirty miles south. Along that road, were farms, at about half-mile intervals. Down at the south-west, the hop poles in Mason's field, were piled in great Vs; the buildings of the farm looked like the model toy affairs, that children arrange on dining tables.

Directly at the foot of the sheer cliff, under the hanging ledge, lies the village; the dwellings mostly hidden by the trees, the river winding among the red, and grey, buildings; a long blue baby ribbon of reflected sky, curled in and out, all through the valley.

The assorted colors, of the house paints, and the different shades of foliage, & crops, made the individual farms look like the checkered squares of old-fashioned counterpanes. The old brass ball, and sharp point, of the church steeple, were indistinguishable; the base of it appearing like a white square; for, from here, one beheld it, as if he were looking upon it from heaven.

Under the ledge, a small section, of the eastern road of the valley could be seen. It seemed, as if, by holding out the hand, and dropping a stone from the fingers, one could strike that microscopic wagon and its two horses. The chances seemed many, that the stone would fall in the wagon, back of the man on the seat, even though, from the ledge here, the whole thing, wagon and two horses, looked no larger than an ant. But, as one looked at it in wonder, it passed out of sight, and the top of the trees,

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seemingly pointing toward one, met the bewildered eyes.

After a long, tiresome trip up the ditchy road, around to the east side of the mountain ascent, up to the root-and-stump fence, up the road, lined by spruces and sumacs, and over the evergreen top of the mountain, Tim and Hi finally reached the slope, that ran down to the rock ledge. Needless to say, there had been a great number of rests, and a good many attempts to make the trip cooler, by the removal of part of their clothes. There is no doubt, that if the trip had been a half-mile longer, and Tim had continued to remove articles of clothing, as often as he did, he would have found himself on the ledge, in the same condition that, in Eden, Adam did.

But, luckily, as the distance grew less, the old lawyer, who in removal of dress, was a vest and shirt behind Tim, urged the old bachelor so much, that they were not altogether unpresentable.

At the slope, they grasped the bending branches of the trees, and the roots washed bare by many rains, and began their descent to the rock ledge.

Suddenly, the venerable gentleman of the black gown slipped and sat down, and all the dignity of the law was jarred out of him. A few displaced stones rolled down the slope, bounded off the rock ledge & fell—down—down—down—to the valley, below.

"She is n't worth half this trouble." he exclaimed.

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Then, when his dazed senses regulated themselves, and he found himself safe on the ground, while Tim stood at the top of the slope, hesitating, Hi saw another side of the situation.

"Look out, Tim. Do n't you fall. You 'll roll off the ledge like those stones."

Tim's face was red, and his cheeks were blowing in and out like appearing, and vanishing, red, half-apples.

"You might respect the dead and not try to be funny." he answered, panting for breath.

Hi safely reached the ledge, dropped the rope on it, and looked at the valley in wonder. The beauty of it, the impressiveness of it, made him forget the errand.

"Gad—Tim—it 's the grandest sight I ever saw."

Tim sat down, and aided by the trees at the side, half slid, and half pulled himself down the slippery part of the path. When he reached the ledge, and had begun to wipe his face with a black handkerchief, he too, was oveawed by the sight.

Far up to the north, to the west, & further, to the south, the hills had taken on their nightly haziness. Beneath, lay the village, with its familiar roads and farm lands; spot-like cows were moving, toward their accustomed stand, at the gates; here and there, a dot of a man, or woman, moved along a path, or a road; here & there, a little smoke rose up from a chimney, and melted away in the still air

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before it had risen, half as high as this hanging, rock ledge.

The sun had stolen back of the endless lines, and lines, of purple western hills; the sky was a cool, twilight harmony of soft salmon and green blue; and, only a few dark clouds were scurrying, down from the north-west.

In his shirt sleeves, Hi stood, and pointed to the village. His long, lanky arm, his hair ruffled up, & his slight body, clad in close-fitted clothes, made a striking silhouette, against the background of the western sky. Tim took off his shoes, and shook out the pebbles and sand, that he had collected, on his way down the slope.

"There 's the grist mill." said Hi.

Tim looked at him, and began laughing.

Hi pointed again, and shouted, "Do n't you see it?"

"Yes." Tim answered.

"Well, what are you laughing at?"

"It struck me, that, as you stood there, you made a picture, like a poster on my barn door."

Then Tim laughed again.

"I did n't know Mrs. Logan allowed posters on the barn."

"She does n't usually. But she wanted to see the show and had n't any money, and so she had to let them put up that one to get a free ticket."

"What picture was it? I do n't think I 've ever seen it."

"The devil pointing down to hell." Tim answered.

Then both the old cronies laughed, and Tim rubbed the

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tears from his eyes. They stood near the edge of the ledge.

"Do you know, I believe that every man, who feels himself important in our little village, ought to be compelled to come up here, and just look, and look, until he realized how insignificant he was." said Hi seriously.

"But some people feel important because they know for sure that they are."

"Are they? Just look up there at the sky, and then way off there, and then down there to the village."

"Yes."

"And then follow my hand right along, to there."

"Yes."

Hi stopped, then he blurted out, "By the way, those trees are Philip's prize acre."

"They look as if he measured them when he set them."

"I would n't be a bit surprised." Hi answered.

Tim grasped Hi by the arm, and pointed.

"Is that old red house the Wells' place?" he asked.

"Yes, that one just above the dam."

"And that field up there, is where the bonfire will be set off, when—"

"Gad!" Hi exclaimed, reaching for the rope. "We forgot all about Phoebe."





CHAPTER XVII

MILDRED AND PHILIP

MILDRED ran, until she was almost breathless, & then walked a little distance; so that she might run again. She wished to hurry home, where she could hide her head in the pillows, and clear up clouded skies, with a flood of tears.

She did not have it clear in her mind what the matter was. Philip had said something "awful". She could not remember what it was; but it was "awful". He had turned his back, and had walked away, leaving her alone, in the dark.

So, by alternately running and walking, she reached the summer home of Mr. Burleigh, and at sight of the lights, she experienced a temporary feeling of safety. Therefore, as she came up before the house, she walked slower than ever, and looked in the window.

At the side of the large centre table, now and then lighted up brighter by the flaring flames of the open fire on the hearth, sat Burleigh. In his arms, cuddled close to him,

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was a little golden-haired boy; at the back of his chair, stood his wife with outstretched arms, pleading for the little fellow to "come"; and, on the floor, sat another little fellow, playing with lead soldiers.

After she had gazed at the scene some time, Mildred suddenly realized that someone was coming up the river-side path. Then, when she turned and listened, she heard hilarious laughter, and shouting, across the river.

She looked back into the darkness, where she thought Philip was, and then she glanced at the little bridge, the end of which was near her.

Perhaps, the people, on the other side of the river, were men. Their unusual hilarity suggested to her that they had been drinking at the inn. In truth, when she had left the village that morning, the inn was closed, but perhaps Martin had, by this time, returned. He was expected at any time; and inns never close permanently, when men want to drink.

Everything was all wrong. She was so unhappy. She wanted to drop down and cry. But, for fear that those drunken people, across the river, might come over Burleigh's bridge, for fear that Philip might reach her, she resumed her alternate walking and running.

The voices were soon left behind, and because she was sure that, by this time, Philip was between her, and those people, she walked, more than she ran. She was tired.

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In her momentary unhappiness, she had not thought that Philip would follow her all the way; especially since she had called to him, that she was going home. She forgot, that he had started out with her for that purpose; she thought he might come, as far as the village stores, and then go back to the farm.

What was that noise? Evidently someone was following her, but how could she tell, until too late, whether it was a drunken man, or Philip? The underbrush cracked, and the sound of footfalls, on the path, sounded wonderfully near, in the darkness.

She ran again, faster than ever, until she reached the outlying houses of the village. But they were dark, and still, and ghostly, and shivers ran up and down her back. How welcome were those bright lights, in the windows of the corner store!

When she had passed them, she felt safe, and walked. She knew she had eluded her pursuer; so that she could go slowly. Now, it did not matter, whether it were Philip, or one of those drunken men. Presently, she reached the little red house, and softly closing the door, went to the open window, and looked out. Her mother called to her, from up-stairs.

"Is that you, Mildred?"

"Yes, mother dear."

"Is Philip with you? I did n't hear his footfalls."

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Mildred jumped, and her heart-beat quickened. She had not expected her mother to remind her of the forester.

"No, mother."

Then, hearing a familiar step, on the walk, near the blacksmith shop, she suddenly realized, that Philip had been following her, and that he was coming to the house.

"Philip is coming to the door." her mother called.

"Yes." she answered.

She ran to the open window, wound her skirts tight around her, held to the casing, with both hands, and by the strength of her arms, drew herself out, and dropped to the ground.

At the opposite side of the house, the familiar step had come to the door. Philip was knocking.

She stole quietly down the bank, to the water, hastily glanced at the boat, to see if the oars were all right, and jumped in, pushing it from the shore.

"Mildred." her mother called.

By a few, quick, strong pulls with the oars, the boat shot out, over the clear water, and she was safely away.

Then she heard the door open. The darkness hid the house from view, and only a faint glare of light shone on the white walls of the smithy. Voices came to her—her mother's and Philip's. Out over the water, came a clear call, in a melodious voice.

"Come back, dear. Come back, dear. It's all right."

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At first she hesitated, as if about to return. Then, she pulled, harder than ever, at the big oars,—she splashed the water over the back seat. Again the call came, now fainter.

“Mildred—Mildred—come back!”

“Back” echoed from the buildings, along the bank by the grist mill. She listened for another call. She wondered what it would be. If he called again, she would go back. But no call came.

The water grasses tangled in the oars, and held, as if they were pulling with a will to take her back. She had to allow them to slip off the end of the oar; in doing which, the impetus of the boat decreased.

She pulled into clear water; so that the boat went faster. As the oars went under the glassy surface, the water splashes seemed to cry “Mil-dred. Mil-dred. Mil-dred.” And too, in Philip’s voice. The water sighed, when the oars were raised out of it,—oh, such a sad sigh! How heavy they were growing! Every time, they were dipped deep into the water.

As she half turned in the seat, to see her course, along the bend of the river, she saw a light coming from the field, down to the riverbank, ahead of her. Panic siezed her. What if Philip had run up the bank, had beaten her, and was coming with Dorn’s boat to catch her. Oh, she would n’t be caught! But, how heavy the oars were!

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Her strength revived, when she saw the light returning up the bank. The boat went a little easier. Then she held the oars still, and listened.

Surely that was a splash in the water, just back of her, where the light had been! Perhaps, Dorn had gone down with Philip, to unlock the boat. Philip must be coming in pursuit! She summoned all her strength, and the oars went quickly back and forth.

Faster and faster! The splashing, of her oars, deafened her to those weak sounds, of the bell, on the cow, that had driven its comrade into the shallow water.

Faster! She was sure Philip's boat was just behind hers. She could hear the water plainly.

The oars skimmed across the top of the water, sending a big splash into the air, the boat gave a lurch, and the grasses swished along the bottom of it, until it stood still. She listened.

The water quieted. Frogs, disturbed by the last ripples, croaked on the banks. Her breathing was short and quick. She waited, expecting to hear Philip's voice—waited—waited. The frogs seemed to be mocking her, the place seemed lonely, and oh, it was so dark! She bowed her head to her knees. She trembled in fear. Then, the flood of tears came.

While Mildred was crying, what was her Philip doing? Down in that land of Arden, he had no sooner taken those

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few steps, into the darkness, than, in his emotion, he became bewildered, and knew not which way to turn, so as to find the path beside the river. But his confusion did not last long.

He no sooner heard Mildred's answer, than he turned, and hurried, until he could see, dimly, that retreating figure, some distance before him. He walked faster, but it seemed as though he could get no nearer to her. Some magic power seemed to have snatched her up, and borne her, far far ahead, out of his sight.

So he pursued her, until he came to Burleigh's home. He looked up at the top of the house, and he saw a few sparks fly up from the chimney. Then he glanced toward the window, and the scene that he saw, made him stop and deliberate. It was different from the scene, that had stopped Mildred. The two little boys had been taken upstairs to bed, and the man sat there, alone, staring at the fire.

Philip hesitated, and thought he would go in, and talk with his friend. Then he realized that it was night, and Mildred was alone, walking toward her home. So he hurried, and followed her, but it seemed as if she were a maid of the mist; for whether he ran, or walked, he could not overtake her.

When he knocked at the door of her home, and heard her mother calling, he had thought of turning back. Then

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something seemed to tell him to stay longer, & he stayed.

Later, when he failed to make Mildred come back, by calling, he was prevailed upon by Mrs. Wells to sit, and wait, until he should hear the splashing of the water when she returned. Then, he would go to the bank, to meet her.

So he sat and talked with the widow—but how long it seemed! When a subject was wanting, the conversation turned to the probability of the length of time, before she would return. Every few minutes, he would go to the window, to listen; but again and again, it was in vain.

Suddenly he jumped,—and Mrs. Wells noticed it, and asked what was the matter. He gave her an ambiguous answer, as an excuse; but he brooded over the thought, that entered his mind. What if Mildred should overturn the boat, and drown?

He arose, and went to the window. His hands trembled, and listening, he leaned on the sill. He had tried to act calm, & collected, so as not to alarm the woman, who watched him, but he felt sure that she half guessed the truth. He turned his head, listening more intently. He thought he could hear a faint splashing of water, far off.

The sound came nearer,—a splash, keeping the regular time of a trained oarsman.

“Thank God, she’s safe,” he exclaimed, and went to the door.

The tears left Mildred weaker, but happier, and more

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of a lover than ever. All the dark clouds were scattered.

Having rolled up her sleeves, she leaned over the side of the boat, and bathed her eyes. Then she stood up, and pushed with the oar, to take the boat out of the grasses. It only moved a little, and was not free.

She sat down, and taking one oar in both hands, whirled the boat around, and off, into the clear water. How much lighter the oars seemed! How much easier the boat ran over the water!

At the bend of the river, she looked ahead, just in time to save it from running upon the bank. Along the field, where the light had been brought down, she saw the few cows, standing, staring out toward her, as if they wondered what crazy person was rowing on the river, at that time of the night. Unconsciously, she hurried, faster and faster,—and yet the boat seemed to go too slowly.

Like Philip, she too had some moments of a horrible thought. While the boat was moving easier, she suddenly thought, that perhaps Philip had gone home,—that she would not see him until to-morrow,—that she would have to go to sleep, with the thought in her mind, that they were not on the right terms with one another.

Then, the oars became heavy again. She plodded and plodded, but, oh, how long the river course seemed! She held the oars in the air, and listened. There was no mistake, that was Philip's deep, baritone voice!

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Faster and faster,—but she thought she could not row fast enough. Faster and faster, and nearer, and nearer, she was to Philip. When she saw the light in the house ahead of her; with a few, strong, hard pulls, she drove the prow grinding upon the shore.

She jumped out, and pulled the boat further up. She felt a little dizzy, but she took hold of the boat, and steadied herself. She groped her way up the bank, the high, high bank,—so much more difficult, and long, than when she ran away.

She reached the top, and stopped for an instant. With a lantern in his hand, Philip came around the corner of the house. She ran toward him, and buried herself in his arms. He dropped the lantern, extinguishing it.





CHAPTER XVIII

PHOEBE RETURNS

TWO DAYS passed, before Martin returned to the inn, and resumed his part, in the life of the village. No little talk and stir was created upon his arrival; for, most of those villagers were anxious to hear where he had been; if, and how, he had found Phoebe; and, whether he had severely punished Joel. If the greater part of them had had their wish, they would have arranged the meeting, between Martin and Joel, to occur on the village corner, where all could have seen, and enjoyed, the punishment, that they were certain that he had given. To most of them, there was an excitement and curiosity such as spreads through the gallery in the last act of a melodrama.

Martin's return reminded them of a former day, when he had gone out on a search for Phoebe; but, there was one essential difference between that quest and this. Before, he brought back a weeping girl; now, the confirmed runaway, was not by his side in the dusty buckboard.

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As he made his appearance, coming from the eastern road, to the fork, and turning down the road, into the village, he was greeted by one of the pugilistic element.

"Hold up your left hand, Martin," he shouted at the landlord. "Did you give it to him?" he added.

Martin responded to his request, by holding his hand up to view. Then the man turned away, disappointed; having expected to see Martin's knuckles wrapped up in a handkerchief. A queer look stole over the old landlord's face, and he continued on his way.

With Martin's return, the talk about Phoebe was renewed, and the searching ceased. For over an hour the school-bell rocked to and fro, ringing as if it had gone mad, or, the devil himself had taken to playing tricks in the old belfry. Then too, the preparations were not to be wasted, and all morning, a big fire sent, far above the valley, a shower of sparks, and flung, to the winds of the heavens, a smoky pennant, that could not fail of being noticed for many miles around. There is no doubt, but that, during the Babel of bell, and of flame, every villager in the valley, paid an enquiring visit to some neighbor, or, themselves went to the corner store, or to the Golden Dog, to learn the news. But, there was doomed to be a great many dissatisfied people in the valley on this Tuesday.

When he rode down the street to the tavern, and turned into the courtyard, the serene face of Martin showed

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that peace and quiet rested in his mind, & everyone knew that something had been done; that the search for Phoebe had been successful; that matters had been adjusted to suit those concerned. But, the unconcerned would have liked a few details.

Some, in the crowd, saw something more on Martin's face; but they kept it to themselves, and only muttered, that it was "too bad". Needless to say, that look about the eyes, that Tim and Hi had noticed, some days ago, was not now a fleeting expression; it was permanent, and a few of the villagers were acquainted with it, and recognized it, when they saw it on Martin's face.

Most of those, who joined the little procession, following his buckboard down to the Golden Dog, expected that he would tell them something about the trip he had taken. They took that much for granted. They thought it quite in keeping with his "hale, hearty and well-met" character. But they were disappointed.

Martin maintained a discreet silence, & looked at them, as if he could not understand their curiosity.

"Well, did you find her?" one addressed him, as he drove into the courtyard of the inn.

"Yes," he answered.

Then they all stood, and gaped, waiting for him to tell them more. But he did not.

"Did you see Joel?" another asked, satirically.

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"Yes, I did." Martin responded. Then he became silent

The crowd could hardly believe their ears. They discovered a trace of pity, and tenderness, in his tone. They had expected him to burst forth, in a torrent of abuse, and curses, on the prodigal Joel—and perhaps he might say, that he had had satisfaction from him, by giving the old drunkard a good sound pounding, as he had done not long ago. But his silence struck them dumb; and, for a time, no one bothered him with questions and few said anything in a gossiping way to any other of those present.

Evidently, there had been a change, in Martin's opinion concerning Joel, but the landlord did not stop long enough, to give them a chance, to ask, or suggest, what had happened. After his customary greeting to the hostler, Roland, he gave his conveyance into his care, and, having asked, and being informed of, the whereabouts of Mrs. Martin, he shuffled off up-stairs.

Then it was, for the first time, that some of those wonder-struck villagers, noticed that Martin was not the old light-hearted, jolly man, he always had been. His shuffling betrayed him, and turned their sympathies, from expressions about the absence of Phoebe, to a pity, for his present infirmity. Those, who had understood the fatal look, about his eyes, had long ago slunk away from that noisy crowd. Those that now saw him, expending all his effort in trying to conceal his weakness, turned away, and

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made heroic endeavor to change the subject of conversation, to one that had no relation to the disappearance of Phoebe. Shortly after, the villagers dispersed, and at the inn, silence reigned for a time.

"Inns never close permanently". Only too true. On the day, on which Martin returned, it came about, as Mildred had said.

The shutters were no longer barred, the door was unbolted, the windows were half open, for an airing, and the Golden Dog was ready, as ever, to respond to calls for drinks, or food, or lodgings. The shades, of the sleeping quarters, were raised, and the chambermaid's keys jingled through the halls, the kitchen resounded to the clatter of dishes, the odor of cooking scented the air, and the barn doors were rolled wide open. After a two days sleep, the inn opened its eyes, with the prospect of never closing them again, until its death and dissolution.

But it was very noticeable, that Martin did not do very much of the work. In fact, there was a rumor, originated and circulated by one of the gossips, who sat back of closed blinds, and kept her eyes on the doings at the inn, that, hereafter, Martin would not take any active part, in the evening gathering, in the barroom—that he had sent for Bill Comstock. For once in her life, this lively old president, of the village "literary club", came near a semblance of the truth, and promulgated a scintilla of gossip, that

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was unadorned, and unembellished, by a fanciful imagination. It may have been, that Martin's action suggested the gossip, but it is just as probable, that the gossip suggested the action. However, so the rumor ran.

Not long after the unusual activity, at the inn, had indicated, that it was reopening, more, of the villagers, returned to the grist mill,—the headquarters of the search for Phoebe,—and learned that she had been found by her father; but they, too, were given the same generalities, and there was a decided scarcity of details. The only thing they had to learn, and to tell, was that Phoebe was found, but they could not see her; for she was not at home, and they could not tell where she had been found, for they were not fortunate enough to have found her.

After their fruitless expedition, to the hanging ledge of Mount Henry, Tim and Hi had joined one of the parties, who were making inquiries at all the houses, along the roads of the valley; and about supper time, they returned, with that party, to the mill, and learned the news that the lost had been found, and the inn had reopened.

That night, the rustic group, congregated at the corner store, before the mail came, was much larger than usual, and the adventures of the searchers was the only subject under discussion. Needless to say, in their experiences, there had been a deal of the ludicrous, mingled with the tragic. As an example, there was the old cronies' visit to

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the mountain top, which proved a favorite; and, while Tim sat on the steps, and Hi stood with arms folded, and puffed at one of his stogies, there were a good many repetitions of the story.

Gruber came tottering up the road, and approached the group. Immediately all eyes were turned toward the bent figure.

"Have you heard how Felton and Hosmer went up the mountain?"

"No. What about it?" the old reprobate responded.

Then the story had to be told again, and at every laughable point, Tim was either slapped on the back, or poked in the ribs, and Hi was assailed with off-hand remarks about their cleverness. But the experience of the two old cronies had no sooner been related to Gruber, than they were released from their torment. One of the men set up a triumphant shout.

"Here comes Sid Leary! Here comes Sid Leary! Wait 'till we get him to listen to it. And then we 'll hear his—oh, ho!—his bad luck."

And so they laid hold of Sid, and compelled him to sit, and listen, to the tale. It was evident, that Sid wished to avoid the crowd; for he tried to escape them, by going in the direction of the side door of the store; whereupon, two of the men overpowered him, and he was forcibly persuaded to join them on the prominent front stoop.

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At every round of laughter, Sid hesitated from joining, until he saw that one and another looked at him, as if he were doing wrong, not to laugh; whereupon, he would force out a wheezy little cackle. To say the truth, old Sid seemed to feel that the affair was a matter of weight, and he acted, as if he were laboring under a heavy burden. He expected his doom, and trembled at it. And it came!

When the tale of the cronies had been again ended, and everybody sat waiting, the fiction monger had a hearty laugh, all by himself, and exclaimed.

"But, say! That does n't hold a candle to our friend Sid's experience!"

"Let 's have it." half a score shouted.

Whereupon, Sid went up to the man, and whispered.

"Here! None of your bribery. We want that story, Sid Leary, and if you do n't like it, you can go inside, and put your head in the flour barrel."

Needless to say, Sid took advantage of the opportunity to get away, and after receiving a few jibes, and pokes, and slaps, he escaped through the crowd, into the store. But, it is not known, whether or not, he hid in the flour barrel.

It seems that Sid was one of those, who had searched along the river. It was on the night, following Phoebe's disappearance, that he borrowed a boat, and after many difficulties, finally reached the pool, wherein Philip had

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"played" the trout. The dusky night was cool and quiet.

By some fantastic reasoning, he had decided, that this Phoebe would choose that spot, as the most appropriate, for suicide. He did not stop to question, whether or not, she would take her own life. He deduced it, by a rustic ratiocination, as an absolute necessity. He forgot that she had something of a runaway's disposition, and he decided that Phoebe must commit suicide; that just a runaway was no outcome, for his story, of her life. He made himself the victim of that "literary club's" president, who, like Charybdis, lurked behind the blinds; and, it is even possible, that, if he had chanced to meet Phoebe, down near that pool, he would have argued her into following out his deduced conclusion. So, with his mind full of such fantasies, he began to drag the pool.

He had not labored long, before he struck something, that felt like a body, and, of course, he was absolutely sure it was Phoebe's. At first, his impulse was to quietly drag it up, and take it to the village, without a word to others of the party, who searched near the river. But, upon reflection, he thought it would bring him more praise, and prestige, if he had some of the other, less fortunate, searchers as witnesses of his wonderful clear-sightedness, foresight, etc. Whereupon, he called and called, and brought to his side, a half-dozen staring-eyed villagers. They stood there, and looked at Sid, as if he were a magician. They

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glanced at one another, and every one, in turn, whispered, "why did n't I think of this?" or something to that effect. And then, they watched Sid, slowly raise the pole, and drag up that limp, oozy mass. Sid's eyes were opening wider and wider, as it approached the surface, and the men, on the bank, were leaning over, further and further, in their eagerness to see it.

Suddenly, one of them burst out laughing; for his eyes were the best of the group.

"Oh, Sid, you old fool. It 's a dog!"

Whereupon, the man in the boat dropped the body and pole, pulled to the opposite shore, went home, and entirely gave up the searching.

Besides numerous repetitions of their own experiences, this story about Sid Leary, was the principal talk of the group, with whom Tim and Hi had stopped, on the way to the Golden Dog.

As usual, the hour of seven found the two old cronies, in their seats, in the barroom. They were glad to resume their places, at the corner table. Two days had seemed a long, long time, during which they had, many times, longed for their customary game.

As they came into the room, and went toward the corner, they were surprised to see Martin come in the kitchen door, and take his customary place.

He began to wipe the glasses, holding them up to the

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light; rubbing them hard, and placing them upside down, in a row, on the bar.

"Frankie found the missing "man". It 's here." Martin spoke up.

In an instant, Tim was on his feet, and with outstretched hand, stood before Martin.

"Bring back that weight and you can have it." Martin added.

Hi turned in his seat, and tossed the weight, across the room, to Tim. Tim caught it easily, slammed it down, near the glasses, and received the ivory piece in exchange.

"Thanks." Tim whimpered, opening the conversation.

Martin did not respond.

"I heard you were not going to serve to-night."

Martin heaved a deep sigh.

"No. I guess my days are about over."

"You do n't calculate to give up your trade, do you?"

"Oh, no. Just sort of retire from action." Martin replied.

"And who 'll run it for you?"

"I guess Phoebe will manage that."

"Oh, yes. Of course." Tim said, hardly able to keep from dancing, because of his joy. Then he added, "And she is well and pretty and nice as ever?"

Martin nodded.

"Come on, if you 're going to play." Hi shouted at Tim.

"Yes." Tim responded. Then, he took some big pieces of

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sweetflag, from a dish on the bar, and chewing, returned to the table.

"Gad! What are you chewing?" Hi asked.

"Sweetflag. Have some?"

"No. I'm going to smoke. I hate that stuff. It's as bad as those old-fashioned lavender-smelling sheets, that old Comstock tried to revive in Peaceful Inn."

Out from Hi's pocket, came a stogie, and Tim chewed sweetflag, and shook the dice.

"It seems good to be back here again."

"Yeh." Hi answered.

"Guess I'd rather be here than wild-goose-chasing up the mountain."

No answer.

"My, but that was a big sight though. And when those blisters on my hands were getting sorer and sorer and you came up with that old blanket instead of—"

"Oh, do give that up. Did n't you get enough of that, at the corner?"

Tim, evidently, thought that he did, and they continued the game in silence. From the back of the house, someone called for Martin. The voice seemed familiar. When the landlord had shuffled out, the two cronies listened. Tim thought he heard Phoebe say "father". Hi heard a mumbled lot of talk, and did not single out Phoebe's voice, perhaps, because he did not care, whether or not, it was she.

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"The girl's come back in the dark, I bet." Tim spoke up, cheerfully.

"Oh, damn the girl! Your shake."

Then, after a few more moves, the voices ceased, Hi had "gammoned", and the game ended.

The sound of the small bell of the school-house, came to their ears, and its mournful call, in distinct contrast to the alarum peals of the morning, rumbled through the valley.

Hi and Tim tossed the "men" inside, and closed up, the backgammon board; while one of the waitresses came in, and served them with ale, over the bar. After that, they went out, and strolled up the road.

They parted, at the corner, where the story-tellers had been; Tim going toward home, and Hi, to the store, before continuing to the little school-house, to attend the village meeting.





CHAPTER XIX

THE TOWN MEETING

THERE IS only one place, in the Valley of Gardens, in which its worthy inhabitants were accustomed to hold public meetings, of a non-religious character. That was the school-house. The building was located at a corner, on the eastern valley road. Past the door, to the north of it, the public highway ran, up the valley, to the little country railroad station; to the east a road, overgrown with grass, ascended a little rise of a hill, ran along a level, past the house, and barn of the Flander's, where Tim and Hi had procured the rope, and then, came to that winding, and difficult road, that took one up the mountain. The road, to the south, was the means of communication, between the village, & this little building. Flat fields, now obscure in the darkness, lay at the western side of the roadway.

The spot was pleasing. As one stood on the stone doorstep, and looked westward, the lights, in the houses, and stores, that lined the centre road of the valley—the road

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that ran down past Hi's law office, the mills, the Wells' house, the blacksmith shop, and the stores, to the corner store,—presented somewhat of a warm, home feeling, and made many little tongues of light wiggle on the little river's surface.

As a location, the school-house had,—if we except the Farm of the Blue Sleigh,—the best of any, of those buildings, that lie on the outskirts of the village. It was not in the village, and yet it was not entirely out. It was far enough removed, to be quiet, & not so far, as to be gloomy.

A few steps to the north, on the opposite side of the road, was the ruined remains of the former Peaceful Inn, and, if one stood in the old school-house window, and glanced through the intervening lacery of foliage, the cumbrous, barn-like structure could be seen, looming up against the sky.

The school-house was of common, ordinary, six-day-in-the-week brick, of which the color, was that cheap red. In style,—for it surely could not pretend to any architecture,—it was like a hundred thousand other little country school-houses; one big room, with other smaller ones, at the end, in which was the main door. Its walls were unadorned, save for the presence of an ugly blackboard. An A.B.C. chart, at the side of the teacher's desk, on the big platform, a shelf of histories, and spellers, and readers; a box half full of chalk, of which there was not one whole

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piece; a few occasional sheets of paper, on the desks, a box of stiff, & dried, geraniums, were the principal signs, that the place had served for a school-room. Had none of these been evident, the presence, on the top of the stove, of a small block, with its red and green colors nearly gone, and its corners worn round, would have been enough to indicate its former occupants.

But to-night, the unrighteous invader held possession. The bell tolled, and tolled, and the villagers came in, as if they were ghosts, visiting the scenes of their childhood.

The lamps, on each side of the platform, cast a dim, graveyard light over the people, who had gathered there "to consider the question of the village mills, grist & saw," as the written notice, on the post in the corner store, had it.

As each new comer made manifest his appearance, Hi, seated on the platform, raised his head, from its proximity to the shade of the lamp, under which lay a pile of papers, and, after he had received a nod of recognition, from one of the older men, who sat on the front seat, he looked down and studied the papers again. That nod was the means of indicating, to the man presiding, whether or not the indefinite person, who entered, was a taxpayer.

The bi-sexual audience was representative of the tax payers of the Valley of Gardens. While there were many, whom we are compelled to ignore, it is not because they were not deserving of portrayal, that we do so; but rath-

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er, because they were repetitions, of the different types of character, which were gathered there.

From her little house of aristocracy, at the fork of the road, came Miss Featheraway; an auburn tressed, maiden lady, of freckles and nice manners, who held the sole conspicuous position of landlady. It had once been the joy of her life, that Henry Ward Beecher had stayed over a night in her house, and before going, the next morning, had paid her twenty-five cents extra, for his lodging. As she entered, some one arose, and gave her his seat, perhaps, to make her mind rest in peace with the assurance, that the seat was not dusty, perhaps, to make sure that she would find a seat; for, from the way she held up her nose, and sniffed the air, one would think, that she could never have looked low enough to find one for herself.

Mrs. Nickel tried the back door, in vain. She had followed her custom, of trying to get into everything, by an obscure back way, and had come across lots from the old smithy, had climbed a fence,—which act displayed her white stockings to no one's view—and had squeezed her way through a half-acre of bean poles.

If she had been the least inclined to be pessimistic, she would have, long ago, joined her husband, in the little lot in the village cemetery; for as was always the case, she was fated to accomplish the opposite of her intentions.

Ever since she had heard that there was to be a meet-

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ing, she had been thinking it over, and had found so much comfort, in the belief that she could make herself perfectly at home in the old school-house, and would be unnoticed, and could sit off somewhere, in a dark corner, and enjoy looking on. Of course she did not remember that there were no dark corners there, and she expected that all the doors and windows would be unfastened. But, in such a belief she persisted, until she found it otherwise.

Then too, at the last moment, before leaving her home, she thought she would add a little to her personal adornment; therefore she made up a six-inch bunch of bright red geraniums, surrounded by asparagus,—a floral appendage that defeated the intent of the modest blackdress. Of course, we would not recognise her, as Mrs. Nickel, if she had appeared to be as modest as she wished to.

After she had made her unsuccessful attempt on that back door, and had drawn the attention of all those in the building, someone called to her, to go around to the other door, and, having done so, with smiles, and loud apologetic talk, she tripped up the aisle, and tried to modestly hide herself, at the end of the bench; that being the most conspicuous place in the room. Needless to say, she discovered that fact too late; for, five or six men,—one of whom no sooner dropped into his seat, than he dropped off to sleep,—were between her, and the aisle, and her custom forbade her from disturbing one man's peaceful

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slumbers, and full-length comfort and real contentment.

She was a widow of means, with two sons, in a flourishing business in the baby city to the north. She invariably wore black, and, paradoxical as it may seem, understood, and laughed heartily over, a joke.

The next arrival, was Mr. Farquhar; one of the village politicians; a frequenter of the Golden Dog; a man who made it a point of his political position, to inquire into the eligibility of every voter in the town. He slid in, as it were; he did not walk in; he made no noise of footfalls; he made, as it seemed, no bodily movement; he merely appeared, as if he were the evil genius of the illegal voter. He had intended to be early, so as to scrutinize every attendant, but he had paid a visit to the old Dog's barroom, and the time flew so fast, that he was disappointed, and a little angry, when he arrived, and found it later, than he had thought. He had, what is commonly called "blood in the eye", and he relied on the town constable to enforce the expulsion of any one not eligible.

Miss Reade, shrunk up in a camel's hair shawl, and wearing rubbers, ventured out, from down the roadway. She took nice, dainty, short steps, so that, in consequence thereof, she could not cross the muddy ditch, beside the road, without stepping into it. Of course, no one believed the base gossip, that her shoes were too tight. Her sweet, persuasive, siren's voice, her glass-like fragility, and her

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drooping lids, gave her such an airy, fairy, walk-on-the-clouds manner, that no one would be irreverent to her. For fear of more village gossip, she unwillingly left her gum, under the top of the sewing machine, locked up all the doors, forgot the windows, and left the front door key under the mat, the first place a burglar looks in. She felt that her dearest treasure—her gum—was safe, and she hoped the meeting would not “metamorphose itself into a fight”. Needless to say, she was the broadest read woman in the village.

Mason, with a pipe of peace in his mouth, came up from the Farm of the Blue Sleigh. To-day, he was a good illustration of Bulwer Lytton’s saying, that, “the man who smokes thinks like a sage and acts like a Samaritan.” Into the room, he came, with a swing of his shoulders, that suggested strength, and a noise of footfalls, that made it quite certain that he was heavy.

The next arrival was preannounced. Long before she entered, her laugh had reached the room, and a titter had been passed around, as if there had been a consonance, between the woman, and those assembled in the school-house.

At length she arrived,—we say arrived, advisedly. For she did, finally, manage to settle into a seat, although her vacillation, between the seat and the door, kept the anxious people unpleasantly long in doubt of it.

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She had on her arm a hair-cloth cushion, an affair that looked as if it had been taken out of one of those old fashioned chairs. She wore a violet dress, a small, black bonnet, trimmed with black beads, and flaring, red poppies, and over her shoulders, was thrown, after the manner of the toga, worn by an ancient Roman senator, an old-fashioned Paisley shawl.

She sat down, all in a tremble. It was Mrs. Wobbles, a widow, erstwhile a lunatic, who had, with the assistance of numerous patent medicines, of which she was an expert judge, managed to outlive her noted husband, who inscribed the tombstones, of his three, former wives with the legend, "they were so pleasant". She had made three long visits to an asylum, in a big city, and the only evident aberration was, that she insisted on kissing a person, when she, or he, as the case might be, had done anything to meet with her approval. The fact that she continually quarreled with her servant, was the only thing, that kept the poor Irish girl from all the dangers of the bacilli of osculation.

Braglet, the hard working blacksmith, with a face, that for its wrinkles and shape, looked like the traditional devil, came along, like a barnacle, attached to the head of the village, Mr. Weaklig, a jolly typical Westerner, a hale and hearty man, often seen trying to accomodate six children, who had just begun a fight, for the honor of sitting beside

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him on the seat. Weaklig held the village record, for his lightning changes. One minute, clad in overalls, he had been seen to enter the kitchen; the next, clad in his best of black suits, he had emerged from the front door, and had walked down the road, to enter the church, as its best deacon. The good ship of state, and its barnacle, sailed, with flying colors, down the main. Braglet finally found two, good seats, together, and he, and Weaklig, sat down simultaneously.

Mrs. Wells came from the little red house, next to the smithy. Her new, black, silk dress, her grey hair, plastered tight to her head, and her little baby-like bonnet, gave her the appearance, traditionally called, "neat as wax". She had a pleasant smile, for everybody who chanced to see her enter, and she bestowed her greetings, with a curious little lisp, that added to her quaint address. With no noise, no attracting rustle, she chose a seat, at the rear of the room, and was hardly noticed by half of those present.

Quite in contrast to the entrance of Mrs. Wells, was the trio that burst into the room, just as the lady sat down.

Disagreeable Gruber, sugar Gumry, the keeper of the corner store, and squinting, cock-eyed Sid Leary, came from the smoking, tobacco-spitting circle, back of the shoe boxes, at the store. Each had a suspiciously large right cheek, and after a lot of jabbering, under difficulties, they assorted themselves, among those present, & often duck-

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ed their heads behind the shoulder of the person in front of them. Their jaws worked, and they sat, and looked on, somewhat after the manner of curious, ruminating cows.

Miss Oberleigh left off reading a fascinating yellow-covered novel, and after telling her cigar-store-Indian brother everything to be done, while she was gone, she made a few cynical remarks, on the intelligence of village meetings, and went forth, determined to put down any piece of foolishness, which others might propose. When she had forcibly trod on Miss Reade's foot, and reached a seat, back of Weaklig, she began a loud debate, in which she heroically maintained, that all the evils of the village were due to man's obstinacy.

The Vorse brothers came in, one fifteen feet after the other. In that manner, they had come half a mile. They sat, at the extremes of the room, one way up front, on the right, the other, way back, on the left; perhaps, to show that they agreed on nothing. Each one usually insisted that his wife should dress in all the flashy colors of fashion; each one, suspected that his brother wished him, and his family, dead; and each one, when compelled to deal with the other, did the communicating, while standing on opposite sides of the road. At the same time, the wife of each, was securely sheltered, back of the closed blinds, and when actual war threatened, each one of them called off the would-be mortal combatants, and preserved peace.

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The last arrival was Mrs. Sensen, the village invalid. She weighed one hundred & sixty, used powder, because it made her look pale, and walked with a cane, because the cane could not do its own walking. She had the largest house in the village, had no help, kept it the cleanest of any in the county, and yet "never was able to do even her daily chores". She always kept the blinds closed, because she could sit back of them, and watch the neighbors, and she lived in the kitchen, so as not to hear the front-door bell, except when she wished to. No one ever helped her, at house cleaning time, and once, so they say, the old, solid - mahogany high - poster was mysteriously changed, from the hall-room down-stairs, to the room in the south-east corner, up-stairs. She was an invalid, poor woman, and church, and town meetings, were the only events, that could draw her from her rocking chair, before the geranium-filled window.

When the time, for the meeting, had passed, and ten minutes grace was given to delinquents, Hi arose, and introduced the town business, by a repetition, in part, of the corner-store notice.

The question was one of the health of the village. The mills near the dam had shut down, because of the failure of water supply, the banks of the river were muddy slime and jetsam, and the health of the residents, near by, had been attributed, by the doctors, to the state of the river.

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According to rumor, some of the villagers favored the removal of the mills, and others wished the village to have its own mills, and not allow the business to go to those, located five miles up the valley.

Of course, the town meeting had to be divided in opinion. There never was, nor will be, one where it is not. Such a group, could not meet, without a more telling discord, than that of their looks, and characteristics.

Then too, the question had been gone over, thoroughly, before the meeting. That, accounted for most of the absences, of a good part of the tax payers. They were very much like the clear-day-voter; they tested the tide of affairs, and if it seemed to be going their way, they stayed at home, and waited to hear of their success. Occasionally, they heard of their failure, and then each one cursed himself, and swore he would, thereafter, never neglect to vote,—and the next time, he stayed away, the same as ever.

So it was, with the mill question. The majority of the villagers wanted the mills taken away; they did not care where to. The owners could move them, up the valley, a couple of miles, and build a dam up there, where the low water, would not stand stagnant, from the last freshet in spring, to the first in the fall. But they wanted them removed. The majority, of the voters, at this meeting, wanted the mills kept there; they did not live near the river, and

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they could not understand why the mills were not as good looking, as the other buildings along the road. And too, in their opinion, most of those cases of sickness could be traced to wet feet, and exposure, and even their doctors had acknowledged, that there was some doubt, as to the river being the cause of it.

So the meeting stood, and the too-confident majority of villagers, had stayed at home, and had allowed the chance to slip out of their hands, by sending to the meeting, only what proved to be, the minority. Therefore, a few could have been heard to swear, under their breath, or, to a neighbor of the same opinion, that "if So-and-so and So-and-so had only come to the meeting, the mills would go."

When the question had been well introduced and explained, Hi arose, and asked for a few minutes of their attention. Everybody had thought that he was going to ask for the voting proposition, and ears became prurient.

Then, in a clear, slow voice, he read a communication from Philip, the forester. Philip wished to offer, for consideration, by the town tax payers, herewith assembled, the proposal that they should set big trees, along the two miles of cleared banks, north of the village. Then he called to their attention, that trouble at Brookvale, and the drying up of the Gruber brook, both of which had been caused by the same condition of the banks, and both of which could be remedied by the method proposed.

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When Hi had finished presenting Philip's proposal, he asked for the expression of opinions, on the subject, and sat down.

The concervative Miss Oberleigh jumped to her feet, and being recognized by Hi, spoke first on the subject. She did not see why more of a burden should be put on the tax payers. A single line of trees over two miles of river bank would cost a good deal, not to mention trying to re-forest it all.

The shrewd politician, Farquhar, did not believe there was any need to improve the water supply; any such plan only complicated the whole affair. This meeting was held to decide, whether or not, the mills should go. If any, of those present, had not formed their opinion, on the real question, & favored this new plan of Philip Mason's, they could take time to consider it; for another meeting could easily be held.

And then, of course, crafty Farquhar would have the absent non-millers present to vote, even if he had to go out, and drag each one in, by the ear.

Disagreeable Gruber, for once, proved himself agreeable, and testified to his belief, in the work of Philip. He was just about to begin the relation of something, of which he was reminded, when, for fear that he was going to tell one of his disgusting stories, Hi recognized one of two individuals, who were jumping about, and screeching for

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recognition by him. Gruber gave a growl, and sat down.

The younger Vorse ahemed, and hawed, wiped his big mouth, put his hands in his coat pockets, eyed his brother suspiciously, and suggested that they did not need to employ Philip Mason, if they did not wish to. They might get one of the foresters from the city to the north.

Whereupon the older brother, who had been patiently standing and waiting for a chance, expressed it, as his opinion, that notwithstanding his revered brother's (with a bow) opinion, he thought they were all willing to give Mr. Mason a chance, if they decided to have any forestry done at all. Of course he emphasized the "if".

Farquhar said the Vorses were conflicting business and sentiment. Whereupon each of them, looked at the other, as if to say "you fool".

Then, before the two brothers had seated themselves, and Farquhar had been overruled, as being out of order, Mrs. Wobbles arose, and, without addressing the chairman, began, "Is there any one here—" From all parts of the room, came commands of "sit down", "get the floor" and one, that sounded like "shut up". Amid the din, Mrs. Wobbles broke out crying, and sat down.

Dainty Miss Reade, with her angelic voice, succeeded in obtaining recognition from Hi. She thought they all ought to encourage any worthy new plan that our young men could suggest. And especially Mr. Philip should be

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encouraged, for he had had such a hard time, etc., etc.

And so it went on, and before long, two or three of the women were so sorry that they could not seem to agree, and five of the men, were going over it, by themselves, and Hi looked around, and under his breath wished the whole business would adjourn.

Mr. Weaklig arose. His barnacle, Braglet, shifted uneasily in his seat; the Vorses' attention was taken from each other; modest Mrs. Nickel lost her blushes, at being the centre of the crowd of men, who were discussing the question, and looked at Weaklig, as if she contemplated praying to him; Mrs. Wobbles looked through her tears; Farquhar forgot his cunning; Gruber, with his trembling hands, held the arms of a chair, in which he sat and gaped; Miss Reade dropped her lids; and, Miss Oberleigh looked out of the window, as if unconcerned, listened intently, and comprehended more than any other one in the room.

The room came as near to being in silence, as it could possibly have done, when occupied by these people. The oracle, the town saviour, the hero, Weaklig, spoke!

He thought that this meeting had misunderstood the whole affair. He would endeavor to clear it up a little. He would like to make some suggestions. He knew they all would vote for the good of the village, when they understood the case.

His exordium elicited tremendous applause, and some

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minutes passed, before a fresh flood of tears from Mrs. Wobbles could be stopped, and Weaklig was able to continue. Then he did clear up the misunderstanding, and, after his speech was ended, the town constable had to be assured that everything was all right; for he had been sitting on the steps of the Flanders' house, and hearing the noise, had thought that there was a fight in progress, and that his services were needed. But someone, who by far exceeded him in power, was in authority.

When Weaklig sat down, the dove of peace seemed to have come over the whole meeting. Almost miraculous to say, harmony and concord was reached by that discordant assemblage.

The vote about the mills was taken, a motion was made to make it unanimous, Farquhar, convinced in spite of himself, seconded it; & the mills were unanimously voted to be retained. Another vote was passed, by which Philip was to be consulted about the river improvement. A big company, composed of the land owners along the river, was to be formed, to attend to the contract. This company was to be a land improvement company, it was to sell timber, and to guarantee water supply to the mills, for payment of a stipulated sum. Needless to say, Mr. Weaklig was to be its president, and there was no doubt but that, in his hands, everything would run successfully.

There only remained, a vote of thanks to the chairman,

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and a motion to adjourn, to be passed, before the villagers, with much confusion, and talking, began to leave for their respective homes and occupations.

Hi went off, peaceful & contented; Miss Featheraway still held her head in the air, and boasted of the old village "spirit"; Mrs. Nickel thought Mr. Weaklig a perfect dear, and had to thank him; Farquhar was sullen and disappointed, & vowing vengeance, sneaked away in the dark; Miss Reade had a case of the trembles, and hurried home, for something from a flask to brace her up; Mason had a thankful smile, for everyone, who spoke to him; Braglet had "expected to see the fur fly", and felt cheated; Mrs. Wells was in a hurry to carry the news, to Mildred at home; Gruber & Gumry and Leary, seemingly unmoved, took another quid from a plug of tobacco, and filed off, back to the store; Miss Oberleigh was proud that she had stopped their foolishness, and hastened home to find out, if her brother had changed his attitude, and if that hero was murdered; the Vorse brothers disappeared, as if by sorcery, probably one, —which one, is unknown, —was snatched off, in a cloud, up to heaven, and the other, with a sputter of brimstone, to the other place; and feeble Mrs. Sensen grunted and limped along, toward her kitchen.

Mrs. Wobbles had edged all around the room, until she had cornered Mr. Weaklig. Then she had to shake hands with him, forty times; and to the astonishment of those,

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who did not hurry away, she kissed him, twice, before he could excuse himself, and talk business with Mason. But Mrs. Wobbles was not to be suppressed so easily. She followed after him, like a fury in vengeance; but, in the midst of the room, she became excited and forgot that she was pursuing Mr Weaklig, and turned her attention to Mason. She wanted to know, if Mr. Philip was there; she was so sorry he was not; she wanted him to come and see her; she must kiss him, for she knew he would do good work for the village.

Mason and Weaklig winked at each other, and gradually worked their way toward the door. One of the older men straightened out the benches, and having tied tight the bell rope, extinguished the lamps, crowded the people out of the door, and locked it.





CHAPTER XX

THE ROBBER IS CAUGHT

HI HAD just had a scene, with Roland's boy, Frankie, in which, the lawyer had learned, to his disappointment, that the little fellow had thrown the backgammon board out of the window at Joel; when his old crony came in. He looked up, and did not greet him. Tim made a few ahems, and found that he was wrapped up in a brown study.

"Cheerful. Are n't you?" he blurted out.

"Oh! How do you do?" Hi spoke up.

"You do n't seem to care." Tim responded.

"Oh, do n't be foolish, Tim. How did it happen you did n't come to the town meeting last night?"

"Is that what the bell was ringing for? I thought it was prayer meeting."

"Humph!" Hi grunted.

"Did you find out about the board?" Tim asked.

Hi looked up, and only nodded, for an answer. Knowing that something was wrong, Tim lighted his pipe, and

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waited, quite patiently. Hi suddenly jumped to his feet.

"Come on and let's play." he spoke up. "The board was another wild-goose-chase, like the blanket up the mountain." he muttered, as they went toward the corner table.

"You do n't mean to say he did n't do it?" Tim asked.

"No. He did n't. That damned little brat of Roland's did it."

Just at that instant, up-stairs, Frankie let out a few loud screeches, and a man's reprimanding voice resounded.

"Good for him." Hi muttered. "Roland's giving him a licking. I'd like to lend a hand."

The game was begun.

Bang! bang! bang! went the old knocker on the door. Tim looked up from the board, Hi leaned back in his chair, and blew a cloud of stogie smoke, high above the table; and, Martin entered the room and dragged himself to the door, to answer the summons.

None, except strangers in town, used the knocker, and few frequented the inn, on rainy days. Therefore, the old cronies awaited, with interest, and curiosity, the entrance of the knocker.

A tall, slight man, very similar, in build, to Hi, entered. His black coat was buttoned tight at the neck, to protect his weak chest from the unusual chill of the night; his old brown, slouch hat was partly pulled over his eyes, concealing part of his features, & obscuring, in impenetrable

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gloom, the rest of them; and his side, coat pockets buried his hands. He stamped his feet, depositing no little mud on the clean-swept floor, and without a word to Martin, approached the cronies' corner. The hands hidden, the figure indistinct, the face, and hair, in obscurity, made it impossible, for any one of the three, to recognize him. To identify him, if he had gone out, and assumed another hat, coat and walk, would have been unachievable.

Old Tim's first impulse was to sit there, neglecting the backgammon, and stare at the stranger. But, when Hi had looked at the man, and resumed the game, the old bachelor felt convinced, that the stranger was not of much importance, and he too attended to the board.

"Brandy and water!" the stranger growled at Martin, as the landlord stood before him, waiting for his order.

Martin made him a respectful half-bow, limped to the bar, returned with the drink, and received a coin from a hairy, wrinkled hand.

"You're slow enough in getting a drink for a man." came in brusque tones from beneath the brown hat.

"I'm an old man and getting feeble." Martin answered, apologetically.

"Why do n't you let that pretty girl do the serving, as you used to?"

"She will serve if the crowd comes." Martin responded. Then he turned away, and hobbled back to a seat, near

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one of the round tables before the courtyard windows.

While the man drank, Tim chanced to look over Hi's shoulder, and gave him a glance; but he only distinguished a pointed chin, a small mouth, a sharp, red nose, and cheeks covered by wrinkles. Tim shook the dice, & looked at the board.

Evidently, the stranger had been waiting for a favorable time; for, he gave a quick glance toward Martin, then at Tim, and leaned over, in his chair, and tapped Hi on the shoulder.

"Can I have a few words with you, alone?" he asked.

Hi's face lit up as the man spoke, and Tim, overhearing the words of the man, arose, and started toward the back of the room.

Hi looked up, and spoke.

"Oh, it 's you, Daly, is it? You 're damned mysterious, are n't you? Do n't mind Tim here. He 's in the secret. Speak up." Then, he shouted, "Come back, Tim, and sit down."

The man looked at Tim, as the old bachelor returned, and dropped on his corner seat. Presently, he half whispered to Hi, "The robber has been tracked a little way out of Berlin village. Wilson wants the boot-print of the man you suspect."

Hi rubbed his chin, and knitting his brows, in contemplation, he asked, "Of course Wilson thinks the man only

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has one pair of boots? He 's certain of that fact, I hope."

"I guess he does. S—sh! Here comes the landlord."

Martin had risen from his chair, and was coming, to take away the empty glass, and water bottle. Daly's chair came down, on the four legs, with a bang; he leaned on his elbows, and turning out some water, drank it off, at one gulp. Martin held out the tray, and the empty glass clicked, as it struck the bottle.

Outside, the rain now fell in torrents, and little rivers ran down the ruts, in the road. A wagon came rumbling along, and Daly arose, and ran out, banging the door.

Tim rose up, and shading his eyes with his hand, stood on tip-toe and peeked out at him.

"More work for the village lawyer," he said, sitting down with a sigh. Then, he asked, "What do you plan to do? How are you going to get his boot-print?"

"Easy enough." Hi answered.

"You wo n't steal his boots, will you?"

A chuckle from Hi, served as an answer.

"Tell you what you might do." Tim added, with his eyes almost popping out of his head.

"What?"

"Buy them."

Tim delivered this master stroke, with all the emphasis he could. Perhaps that did not seem much, to Hi; for fat, short men of leisure are inclined to be riediculous, when

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they try to be emphatic. At least, it appeared so to Hi.

Hi looked at his crony, in astonishment. A smile played around his thin lips.

"You do n't think I 'm such a fool as to buy those boots, do you?"

Tim did not answer. He was thinking with all the reflective power that he could summon. Of course that was not much. Then it suddenly occurred to him, to ask Hi, how he was going to get the boot-print, rather than try to devise a method for him.

"How will you get it?" he asked, as if they had only begun the subject.

"Phoebe!" someone shouted, in a hoarse voice, from upstairs in the hall. With a sigh, Martin struggled to his feet, limped out of the room, and shut the door. Tim looked at Hi, and whispered.

"Joel?"

"Yes. Joel!"

Tim whistled.

"You see, my man is up-stairs, and I have only got to wait till he goes out. The first soft, wet ground he strikes is my print. Then you can help me study out the peculiarities of it."

Tim's eyes were riveted on the lawyer.

"By the good saint Bobby! You are a ferret. No wonder you are the village detective. You—"

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"Backgammoned!" Hi interrupted, with a joyful shout.

"But how is it Joel is up-stairs?" Tim asked, not paying any attention to the game.

"Oh, your Phoebe was not only fool enough to run away with him, but when they got to Shatley she married him."

"Married him?" Tim gasped.

"Yes."

"Oh, my! Oh, my! Married. Married!"

"You might have expected it." Hi stoically remarked.

"And I 'll lose my little barmaid. Oh, my!"

"No you wo n't lose your little barmaid."

"Why not? She 's married. She 'll go away." he whined.

"Who cares? Come on. Your play, first." Hi broke in.

The old lawyer had rearranged the "men" for another game, and that he might blot out all ideas of Phoebe, he decided he would do the unusual, & conspicuous; namely, he would allow Tim to play first.

Needless to say, Tim was so much surprised, that he immediately stopped his woeful wail, wiped his eyes, and shook the dice. Hi saw his chance, & changed the subject.

"Young Philip has gone in partnership with Sam Carroll, I hear."

"No. You do n't say so." Tim exclaimed.

"That 's what Mason said. They are going to have an office in Farquhar's building on Pitkin Lane. And Sam is going to build a home down the river on those fifteen

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acres that Mason gave young Kate when she married."

"What? Build right near that spot where young Philip is going to?"

"Yes. Just below that big deep pool. You know the place where there is n't any bottom." Hi responded.

"Well—well. Things seem to be going pretty smooth down by the Blue Sleigh." Tim said, more cheerfully than formerly.

"Yes. Since the people have taken an interest in Philip's forestry, the young people down there have had a good chance of getting along. Now, this partnership ought to put that business on a pretty firm footing. Sam knows all about the lumbering business, and Philip seems to have proven a few things in forestry. I would n't be a bit surprised, if they came to be pretty well known all over the country. At least that 's the way it looks."

"Why do you think so?" Tim asked.

"Well, take the plan of setting out an acre of peach trees. You know that those nurserymen would n't give him all those peach trees, unless they expected him to make a success of them. You see, those peach trees are a new variety, and no one believes they will grow well in this part of the country, and the nurserymen want to prove it. I judge they must think him the best forester in this part of the state."

"I suppose they do. Guess he 'll get along well now."

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"I would n't be a bit surprised if he did." Hi added.

"Just as I was coming down here Mary Whipple was over at the corner, and she said she had seen young Philip a talking to parson Worden. Looks as if he were getting ready to be married, with calls on the minister, and building a house down the river."

"May be it does." Hi responded. "When did Worden come back?"

"Oh, he came last night."

"He's been up to Chatauqua on his vacation, has n't he?"

"Yes. He went away the day after he preached at Wells' funeral."

By some inexplicable association of ideas, Tim thought of a letter he had in his pocket.

"Oh, say, here's a letter for you." he spoke up. "I got it from Gumry, when I saw Mary Whipple."

Hi, taken by surprise, seized the letter, and tore it open, without looking at the envelope. After he had hastily read it, he crumpled it up, and jammed it into his side pocket. Then he swore.

"The robber is caught. Let's play in the office. I'm tired of this damned inn." he said.

"So am I. All its attraction's gone." Tim answered. So the old bachelor whined a little, and petulantly slammed the board shut.

The two arose, and putting on their hats, started to-

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ward the door. Hearing the noise, made by their chairs, and heavy shoes, Martin came in, from the hall. As he saw Tim, with the board under his arm, the truth seemed to burst upon him.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"Up to the office. We 're through playing here." Tim answered.

Martin looked at the board, and then at Tim and Hi. No one spoke, and he sighed, and turned toward the bar.

"Oh, by the way, Martin." said Hi, coming out of his reverie. "Joel is n't half as bad as I thought he was. I take back what I said about not liking his looks. If he was fat, and shaved, and dressed up, he 'd look all right. Too much drink is principally what ails him."

No response came from Martin, and out of respect for him, Hi did not add any more. When Tim and Hi turned, and went to the door, the old landlord's head bowed down, on his arms, on the bar.

The blowing rain, and the slashing of the leaves on the elms, made it impossible for them to hear. Martin was crying, as if his heart had been broken.





CHAPTER XXI

THE BURNING OF "THE DOG"

UP AT the little red house, Philip spent the cool evening with Mildred, & when he had walked down to the corner store, in which Gumry was just extingushing the lights, had turned to the right, along the road past the sleeping Golden Dog, and a little later, to the left, along that final stretch of road, past the hop yard, the orchard, the sleigh and the barn; he entered the living room, and found his father seated before a low, sizzling fire on the hearth.

It was the first fire of the season. Outside, there was a little prophetic chill in the air,—a little unpleasantness,—a harbinger of the frosts of winter,—so that the fire was especially fascinating. Added to that, the novelty made it more attractive; for, later, the fire would become almost continuous, for the weeks, and months, of winter. To the Masons, a fire was fascinating at any time, but the first one, at approaching autumn, was almost ecstatic.

Mason sat there, gazing at the struggling flames. The

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light was not strong and great, so that it only accentuated, and made prominent and conspicuous, the general outlines of his figure, his hands and features, while it obscured the design, and style, of his clothes. The grey hair & beard were given a warm glow, the hard, brown hands looked dark and bronze-like, and a weird, distorted, shadowy giant-man fluttered over the walls.

From somewhere up-stairs, came a soft lullaby song, and the metronomic creak, of the floor, under the cradle.

Philip's greeting put to flight the low song, elusive in its sweetness, and for a moment, the creak stopped, as if the person rocking, had listened, at the sound of the footfalls. The old, oblong clock, on the mantle, over the fireplace, tirelessly took up the creak. The tick-tock, of the clock, was temporarily substituted for the creak-creak of the cradle.

"My! Up so late? I thought you would be in bed long ago." Philip greeted him.

"Yes. The baby is n't very well, and Kate thought she might want the doctor."

Leaving the door ajar, Philip went out to the kitchen, and immediately returned, having left his damp hat beside the stove.

As he reentered the room, he expected to see his father standing erect, or going toward the hall door, preparatory to retiring. But again he was surprised. Mason sat

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in his big chair, and in silence, looked intently at the fire.

"I will go for Kate, father. You go to bed." said Philip.

"Oh, I'm in no hurry. I want to talk a little with you, boy. And too you might read to me a little." Mason answered.

Philip drew a chair near the fire, and sat down.

"What did you want to talk about?" he asked.

Mason looked at him, and he met the old man's eyes.

"Mildred." he said.

The Christian name came with a deal of emphasis,—more than the elder man realized,—much more than he intended. At the same time, Philip felt the blood mount to his cheeks, and he looked away from his father, and stared in the fire.

"I saw you going down the fields, when I chanced to go over to the sleigh and—" he hesitated.

"Well, father?"

"Mildred had her arm in yours, and I thought you acted as if you did not care if anyone saw you."

"I do n't believe we did."

"I did n't want you to think I was watching you, boy."

"You need not have thought that, father." Philip replied.

Mason was silent and Philip waited and waited, but his father looked in the fire, in silence.

"Father—" Then Philip hesitated, and looked first at the fire, and then at the floor, before him. Mason looked up.

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"You understand us, do n't you, father?" Philip added.

A smile lighted up the old man's face, and a laugh followed.

"Understand you? You and Mildred?"

Philip nodded.

"Well, boy, we old folks may become dull in general, but when we have been through the mill ourselves, we do n't get so bad that we can't recognize a pair of lovers."

Philip, with a smile on his face, looked at him, and the two laughed. Then the younger took up the poker, and poked at the fire, rousing it. Two cradle creaks, of the floor, sounded up-stairs. Philip dropped the poker, ringing on the hearth, and rising, went to his father's chair.

"You're a trump, father," he said, as he squeezed his hand. "I've wished you knew it all along."

"I rather guess I did," the elder man answered.

"And you're glad, father?" Philip asked.

"Glad? Why, boy, she's the best girl in the village. And her father and I would be young again at your wedding. Do n't you tell anyone, except her, but Wells once said he wished he had betrothed you two, when Mildred was n't any older than Kate's baby up-stairs."

Another little silence followed, and Mason continued.

"I'm glad you have fixed it up, boy. A few times I rather thought you did n't just exactly take to her, but I guess you were just having one of the little troubles. I've heard

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a good deal of talk in the village, & all that will stop now."

"The village gossips have caused us a fine lot of trouble at times." Philip responded.

"Yes. I guess they have. They generally do. But they mean all right, boy. Why there 's that "club". What have they got to do with literature? Almost nothing. You can 't get a group of our country people together, on any pretext, but what you will find them talking about crops, or cattle, or church, or somebody's plans, or doings. And it 's all because their lives are all made up of those things. If they had any other interests perhaps they would not have time to gossip about you and Mildred. Literature comes after all that."

"I never thought of it in quite that way." Philip said.

"Why, look here, boy." And Mason laughed. "We have been more or less gossiping ourselves."

They laughed for a minute or two; then they listened. The clock's tick-tock was the only sound that reached their ears. Philip stepped out of the door, into the dark, and looked up at Kate's window. Presently he came back to his seat, before the fire.

"The light 's out." he answered his father's inquiring glance.

Whereupon he took a book, from the table, near the west window.

"Literature comes after. Shall I read, father?" he asked.

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"What is it?" Mason asked, without looking at the book.

"Pater. The man who chooses his words so carefully."

"Oh, yes. I remember. Yes, read until Kate calls."

Philip continued to turn the pages, while looking for the place, where, on a former evening, their reading had been interrupted. Mason stirred up the fire, threw on a few more logs, and sat down again.

" "A book, like a person, has its fortunes with one, is lucky or unlucky in the precise moment of its falling in our way, & often by some happy accident counts with us for something more than its independent value." "

"Marius the Epicurean" had fallen into their hands, luckily, it seemed.

Mr. Burleigh, the city man, was one day paying a visit to the Farm of the Blue Sleigh, when the subject under discussion, happened to suggest to him the Epicurean life. Whereupon he told the two Mason men, all about Epicurus, his wife Leontion, and friend Metrodorus. The old story of their lives interested Philip so much, that he inquired whether he had a book, in which he might read something of that character; and, as a result, Burleigh loaned him his little wine-colored copy of "Marius".

When the book came into the house, Mason seemed to have suddenly discovered an interest in it, and after looking it over, and reading a paragraph here and there, he thought that it would be just the kind of a book to read

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aloud. So it was that Pater's "Marius" came into their lives.

That was not all. With them, "Marius" indeed counted for "something more than its independent value." It must be remembered that Mason had an enviable sympathy with the young; such a sympathy, as lead the popular Mr. Weaklig to be sought, by the young boys and girls in the village.

It was because of that sympathy, that Mason's name had been linked with that of Weaklig and Wells, the three men, who represented, in the traditions of the present village, the type of the intellectual farmer of the valley.

On casual evenings, as the reading of the Pater book progressed, Mason had carefully been observing the two young people, when their love for one another began, and developed. His youth was not so far away, but that he, with his active mind, could remember it, and his taste and appreciation of literature was not undeveloped. So that to him the life of "Marius" was not without its parallel, in the life at the Blue Sleigh.

Philip was attracted to "Marius", partly because of its classicism, and partly, because he could throw himself, as it were, into it, and forget the struggles with the conservative obstinacy of the villagers. There was something, in the mental developement of the boy Marius, that seemed to come quite home to his own life; so much so that, for

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a time, he imagined that all the experiences of Marius were those of himself, more easily, than in the case of any other book he had ever read.

Fully an hour passed, during which Philip read a good many pages. Since reading of *Benedicta* and her bath of blood, he had noticed, from time to time, that his father did not move, and, now as he ended a chapter, he looked up from the book, and found the happy old man had fallen asleep.

To the older man, the logs, and their flames, and and-irons, had blended and sunk, far far away. A young man and woman, strolling in the fields, a new house built on the river bank, a baby rocked in a cradle up-stairs; all had floated in review before his happy eyes, and his tired eyelids had drooped, and closed.

Philip put the book on the mantle, beside the old brass candlestick; took, from the table drawer, one that pertained to his forestry; and continued to read; but, not aloud.

The fire crumbled to little heaps of soft ashes, pure and white as snow. Outside, a whipporwill wailed and wailed his doleful song. Up-stairs, again, there was a little cry, and a few creaks of the floor, under the cradle. Then all was still, except the noise of pages being turned.

Suddenly Philip's attention was attracted by a peculiar light in the room. He glanced up from his book, and then toward the window that opened to the north.

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"Father!" he exclaimed; and the sleeping man awakened and jumped up. "There 's a fire in the village."

Both hurried to the windows. High in the heavens the sparks flew, as if the fire were the signal for the finding of Phoebe; and the bell of the village church rang out, wildly, screechingly, as if it, too, were giving the same information.


A minute later, Mason was hitching up a horse, and Philip was running, down the roadway, past the sleigh, down the fields, and along the river, toward the village.





CHAPTER XXII

“BRINGING IN THE SHEAVES”

HE HARBINGER of the golden autumn had come. Here and there, among the trees on the cool, low lands, down toward the prize acre, the first suggestion of orange and gold, had become evident. Every night, the dew became heavier. The latest moon of green leaves had become gibbous, and had dodged, with its deformity, among the clouds, and mists, that hung over the land. The migration of the visiting birds had begun, and, they flitted about, in their course, down the valley, as if, after a summer's vacation in the north country, they were making little farewell calls, before returning to the south. The river had swollen a little, but it ran quieter, than it had, during the summer days; so that, it seemed to be foretelling its long winter silence, by becoming sad and melancholy. The insects had either shut themselves up in hibernation, or had passed through their metamorphosis, and ended their ephemeral existence. All nature seemed

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to be preparing for the winter. And, man followed her example. The people of the Valley of Gardens had piled up in the shed, a winter's supply of seasoned fuel, had prepared to cover the ground with compost, and had potted plants, and desecrated their gardens, against the coming of the frost man; for, if they did not do it, he would.

Down the river at the willow, with its pendant branches and leaves, protecting against that faint, suggestive chill from the west, one would have found an excellent place, for a quiet hour of contemplation; perhaps for a little bit of rustic philosophy on the passing of the summer, or the succession of the seasons. Indeed it would be suited to any one of these, had it not been for the noise of building, that could not fail to draw one's attention from any deep meditation.

It was a week ago, that the builders had begun on two houses, not far below the willow. One, was on the land owned by Kate Mason Carrol, on the acres that had been given to her, when she was married. The other, was a quarter of a mile, nearer to the village, just a little below Mr. Burleigh's, situated on a big, level bank, beside a little orchard.

As Mildred and Philip sat under the willow, the noise of stone - breaking, and hammering, was continually in their ears, and when there was a momentary lull, at the building near by, the noise, at the lower one took it up, as

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if it were an echo; so that the place was unusually noisy.

It was the last day of the year's sheep grazing, and Mildred had been their shepherdess; at least, she had been tending them, after the manner of Josey, when he was reading the detective-story paper. An occasional glance was all that she gave them; for she was not alone.

The forester had been at work on the “pasture” land, which Hi had bought from Mrs. Wells, and, now, as they sat, side by side, under the willow, Mildred was studying a drawing, of Philip's, on the reverse side of a pad made for forestry notes. He gave casual glances at some wild flowers, which he had picked, as he came down the fields from Hi's “pasture” land. He waited for her comment.

“Oh, I can't hardly wait to get at it and fix it up. Can you?” Mildred asked.

“No. I wish it was to be ready to-morrow.”

Mildred looked up from the pad, and met his eyes.

“But that would n't do any good.” she said.

Philip laughed.

“No. That's so. We have got to have the great event first.”

“But next Wednesday would be so much better than next month. How slow these workmen are.” she said.

Philip picked up one of his flowers, and looked at it intently, while Mildred studied the rough plan on the forestry pad. Presently, she leaned over toward him, and

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he looked over her shoulder, at their penciled drawing.

"Your pencil." she said, holding out her hand to him.

He put it in her hand.

"In the corner, right here by the fireplace, we can have a little seat." she continued, pointing to the plan, and indicating the place by a mark.

"Like Mr. Burleigh's." Philip spoke up.

Mildred looked inquiringly at him.

"Oh! That 's so. You never saw his." he added. "And every time I see him he has asked me to bring you over there."

For a few minutes, they were silent. Anon Mildred returned the pad and pencil to Philip. As she did so, she looked him in the eyes.

"You want me to see his home?" she asked.

"Yes. There 's lots there that you will like."

"I 'll go." she said, deliberately. "But not until he has received his invitation." she added.

Philip laughed. Then, he took up one of the flowers.

"Here is a guard against spirits. We ought to wear some of it until next month." he said.

"It might keep me away."

"Oh, no. It is against evil spirits."

"Then it would keep the sirens away."

Philip became serious.

"Phoebe Martin, poor girl, is in the place, now, where

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there is no need of this; where there 's no siren's song.”

“Yes, indeed. How hard it must be for old Mrs. Martin. With her home burned to the ground, and her husband and daughter dead.”

“There seems to be a good deal to think about in it all.”

Silence ensued. Philip turned the flower in his hand, and Mildred looked at it.

“What is the name of the flower, anyway?” she asked.

“Oh, just common St. Johnswort.” Philip answered, as he held up the specimen. Then he added, “It 's a bad old weed that father has fought for the last sixty years. He says he would rather fight a line of sharpshooters.”

An unusually loud noise, at the building, down across the river, drew their attention, and brought them back to thoughts of the house.

“Do you suppose that man has finished breaking stone for the fireplace?”

“I guess not. If he had, we would probably hear him shout for joy. This is his third day at it.”

The two listened, and the crack of the stone hammer came along with the other sounds.

“Did you stop at “his” place, in coming down from uncle Hi's pasture?”

“Just for a minute.”

“Did “he” say anything about your,—I mean, our house? Or about Sam's or Kate's down the valley?”

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"Yes. He said he liked both of them." Philip responded.

"Nothing else?"

"Oh, yes. He wants us to come to take supper with them to-morrow. You see he knows to-day is the last day you will be tending the sheep."

A little silence followed, and then Mildred whispered.

"I believe I 'd like to go."

"Would you?" Philip asked.

"Yes. I 'd like to."

Again the sounds of the stone-breaking, and the hammering, came to their ears, and, with the addition of the "echo" from down the river, it seemed, as if they could hardly have heard anything else,—not even their own voices. But, strange to say, they did.

From among the bushes and trees, down toward the prize acre, came a sweet, moving voice; the voice of someone singing. Whoever it was, he was coming up along the river bank, and the song was sung with little intermissions, as if the singer were listening for an echo.

"Bringing in the sheaves." Then a silence. "Bringing in the sheaves." Another silence. "We shall come rejoicing." Another silence. "Bringing in the—"

"Oh, gosh!" Josey cried, as he saw Mildred and Philip.

"Hello, Josey." Mildred greeted him.

He took off his hat, and bowed.

"Afternoon, Miss Mildred. Afternoon, Mr. Philip."

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"What wild flowers have you got there?" Philip asked.

"Turtle - heads!" he answered, holding out the basket. Then he added, "Yous can have some."

"Oh, thank you." Mildred exclaimed.

Philip took his choice, from the basket, and presented it to her.

"That 's for the tickets." Josey added, as he arranged the flowers that Philip had disturbed.

"Josey!" Mildred cried.

"What tickets?" Philip asked, quickly.

The boy looked at each one in turn, and finally summoned courage, and spoke.

"The hop tickets Miss Mildred give me for—"

Whereupon, Mildred ran up to him, & buried the little fellow's head in her arms.

"Hush Josey, you must n't tell that."

Philip laughed, and looked at Mildred, shaking his head and motioning to her, to let the boy free.

"Josey." Philip spoke up.

Mildred released him, and he listened.

"What family do the turtle-heads belong to?"

"Figwort." Josey answered. Then he added, "Say Mr. Philip. Are you going to have a store up at Pitkin Lane?"

"I 'm afraid not." Philip answered.

"Oh, I wish you would, so you could let me stand behind the counter and work those wires that you work when

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you want to put the money in the boxes in the drawer."

"But what would we sell?" Philip asked.

"Oh, flower seeds and boots and candy and cigars and caps and guns and pants and shoes and overalls and—"

Mildred broke out laughing, and Philip joined.

"Oh, go on. You 're making fun of me." Josey said, starting toward the village.

"No. We 're not, Josey." Mildred spoke up.

"How would you like to run the office up at the Lane?" Philip asked.

Josey stopped and looked at him. His eyes gradually grew larger; while that funny little movement again played around his mouth.

"Do you mean it?" he asked.

"Why yes. You would have to keep the office clean, and sit at the desk, and answer questions of visitors, and give information about how busy Sam and I are—and all such hard labor." Philip enumerated, half laughingly.

"You ain't fooling? Are you?" Josey asked, hardly believing what he heard.

"Why no, Josey. Mr. Philip wants you for his office boy." Mildred interrupted. "Have n't you seen that wonderful sign, all gold letters, "Mason and Carrol, foresters, landscape gardeners, and rural architects"? "

"No." he drawled.

Then, for an instant, he stood and stared; the basket

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dropped from his hands, and the turtle-heads were scattered on the ground. He bounded up to Philip, and siezed his hand.

“Oh, you ’re a peach, Mr. Philip. You ’re a peach. You bet I ’ll be your office boy.” he shouted. Then he turned, and neglecting the flowers, siezed up the basket and hurried off.

“I ’ve got to go to the village.” he called back. “Pa wants me to buy some soap, and find out when the Martin funerals will be.”

“I thought you lived with your grandmother.” Philip suggested.

“Nope. Not now. But I used to, while pa went to the city.”

Philip and Mildred exchanged significant glances.

“Come to the office, to-morrow morning.”

“Yes, siree. I ’ll be there.” Josey answered. Then, he disappeared behind the bushes.

“You do n’t think he ’ll be disappointed when he finds you wo n’t have candy there.” Mildred asked.

“No. I do n’t think so. His father told me he used to sit at the desk in the grist mill all day.”

“Then uncle Hi’s story about his father being a hunchback, and the boy being taken away from him, when his wife died, was all a part of his detective business.”

“I guess it must have been. Josey’s father is as straight

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as I am, and he 's merely peculiar. Ever since his wife died he has lived over the other side of old Mount Henry. Before that he used to live up near Gruber. Every time I go over his way I always go in to hear him sing. He must have had an unusually good "tenor" in his day."

"And Josey gets his singing from his father?" Mildred asked.

"From both parents. The wife sang too. Old Mr. Hood has always thought the fact that the villagers here never took kindly to his wife's singing was the cause of her death and now he seems determined to make them recognize someone of the family, and he 's training Josey."

"Hark! He 's singing again." Mildred exclaimed.

The boy's song was sung in such a high key, and such a clear alto, that the sweet tones floated down the valley, to the listening lovers, just as if they were the water-lilies, that brought a message to Mildred, on a former day.

"Bringing in the sheaves. Bringing in the sheaves. We shall come rejoicing. Bringing in the sheaves."

"That seems to be a favorite of his." said Mildred.

"It 's the song of his mother's that the villagers disliked."

The song died away in the distance, the quiet rippling of the water, and a few chirps from birds, took its place. Then the forester, and the shepherdess, realized that the day's work, at the buildings, across the river had stopped. From the west, up near the hillside, came the sound of a

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familiar horn,—a horn of many sunny and sad memories.

He took her hand, and led her up the field. Presently, they were driving the sheep before them, toward the old roadway, and the Blue Sleigh. Out on the evening air, a contralto voice, sent ringing merrily the Walton shepherdess song, “Come live with me, and be my love.”

THE END

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